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PUBLISHERS LONDON

THE GREATEST BOOK IN THE WORLD

BY

T. H. DARLOW

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TO

MY DEAR DAUGHTER

MARY

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To write a short book on this subject is no easy task. To write an original book would be impossible. Scholars will recognize that I have borrowed freely and frankly from many sources. My debts are heavy indeed to works like Robertson Smith: *Lectures and Essays*; Archbishop Trench: *Hulsean Lectures*; R. F. Moulton: *The Literary Man's Bible*; J. R. Seeley: *Natural Religion*; and Professor E. von Dobschütz: *The Influence of the Bible on Civilization*. With special gratitude I record my obligations to the Dean of Christ Church. Moved by a generosity which is as rare as his learning, Dr. White has permitted me to utilize some unpublished results of his life-long study of the Vulgate.

Like Shakespeare, the Scriptures have been grievously overlaid by annotations

and defaced and darkened by commentaries. It is a melancholy fact that such expositions often exhibit the human intellect at its lowest level. The Bible towers above all commentators and all critics. I shall rejoice if these pages induce any one to read again for himself the greatest book in the world.

T. H. DARLOW.

Northwood, Middlesex,
August, 1927.

WHAT is more commonplace than a book? And yet nothing which has been framed by art or man's device is really more wonderful. Few people stop to think how the making of books originated. We assume, as Dogberry did, that "to read and to write comes by nature." We forget that among human inventions the most astonishing of all was the alphabet. To form marks and scratches of certain shapes and then to arrange them so that they could convey ideas from one mind to another—that was an achievement which makes later discoveries seem trivial in comparison. And that was accomplished by forgotten folk long before history began. To-day we take the alphabet for granted, as though it were part of the universal order, like the stars or the sea. Yet there was a

time, as Mr. Kipling reminds us in his *Just So Stories*, when all men on earth were unlettered.

The Beginning of Letters.

We know, to be sure, that writing and reading are of enormous antiquity. In the valley of the Nile inscriptions have been found which go back between three and four thousand years before Christ. Inscribed tablets of clay prove that writing was freely used on the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates at an even earlier date. In various regions primitive people discovered how to convey information by means of a series of rude pictures, after the fashion of the Red Indians. The first Egyptian hieroglyphics were obviously pictographs of natural objects—a bird, or a snake, or a man's hand.

Now it is generally believed that these became the ancestors of the modern alphabet. An eminent French scholar,

the late Vicomte de Rougé, traced several stages in this strange genealogy. First came the Egyptian picture-hieroglyphics, incised on stone. Then these pictures were debased and conventionalized into the thick, leech-like character of the hieratic script employed by Egyptian priests, such as we find painted on papyrus in black, treacly ink. Then these hieratic characters became modified, mainly by Semitic influence, into the oldest Phœnician letters, from which have been derived probably all the great alphabets of the world. Modified again from the Phœnician arose the archaic Greek alphabets, out of which finally grew the Roman a b c—which we learned in our nurseries. A few English letters still bear traces of the picture-signs in which they originated. Our letter M, for example, began as the outline of an owl ; but in course of time the bird's tail and feet and body dwindled away and disappeared, until only its head was

left. Still, however, if we draw a capital M, the two points stick up like an owl's pointed ears, while the strokes between represent the beak.

In the gradual development which we have briefly summarized the really obscure step is the change—it was an immense and astounding advance—from the hieratic characters of Egypt to the alphabetical letters which the Phœnicians adopted and popularized. We can understand how a picture-sign is made to represent a word. That has been the immemorial usage, for instance, in China. Hence has resulted the terrible Chinese script, according to which each word must have its separate and distinct sign or "ideogram", so that several thousands of different signs are required to print the Chinese New Testament. But who can properly explain how the primitive "ideogram," which stood for an object, was transmuted into the "phonogram," which stood for a syllable, and then into

the letter which stood for a single sound ? Picture-writing had been known and practised for long centuries. Many primeval peoples seem also to have used a common body of signs—like the mason's marks on ancient buildings, or like the numerals in arithmetic—which became more or less current along the Mediterranean shores. But what primitive genius first selected certain signs and characters, and then gave them phonetic values ? His was the supreme discovery of the human race. The alphabet went forth conquering and to conquer the world. By the magic of a b c, stone and parchment and paper have been made to speak as with living voices, so that great minds can transmit their thoughts and bequeath their knowledge to their fellow men.

" As Easy as A B C."

People often say about some simple notion that it is as easy as a b c. Yet

even a b c is far more complicated than it appears. Nearly sixty different alphabets or sets of characters have been used by various races. In English there are twenty-six letters ; in Russian there are (or were) thirty-six ; in Bohemian there are forty ; in New Zealand the Maori language is written with only fourteen ; in India the Marathi alphabet includes over three hundred letters, or combinations of letters. Moreover, while many written languages are read, as English is read, from left to right ; others, like Hebrew and Arabic, are read from right to left ; others, again, like Chinese and Japanese and Korean, begin at the right hand top corner of the page and are read downwards in columns ; others, yet again, like Manchu and Mongolian, begin at the left hand top corner of the page and are read downwards in columns. These curious variations, however, complex as they appear, matter very little : they

do not affect the meaning which the letters or characters convey. So, also, compared with the original invention of script, there is less to marvel at in mechanical contrivances like paper and printing and binding. For things like these are accidents and details after all. The essence of a book remains unaltered, whether its chapters be stamped on clay tablets, or illuminated on vellum scrolls, or rushed off a rotary press at the rate of thousands of copies every hour.

Of Making Many Books.

Three centuries ago Cervantes complained that authorship even in his time was too cheap and easy: "There are men that will make you books, and turn them loose into the world, with as much despatch as they would do a dish of fritters." To-day, when new writers and fresh editions come pouring upon us in torrents and cataracts, we some-

times doubt whether the multiplication of printed matter is altogether a boon. To wander through the halls of some huge library afflicts many persons with bewilderment and dismay. The omniverous De Quincey confessed that in a place like the Bodleian he always felt saddened by the thought that he could never hope to live long enough to read one tithe of the volumes. But plain men heave a sigh of relief that from them at least no such task is exacted. They tell themselves that of making many books there is no end, and they cherish the secret conviction that very few authors are worth reading. Indeed sensible people, as they reach maturity, are apt to frame for themselves a private *Index librorum prohibitorum*, which often includes the bulk of so-called literature. They simply refuse to open volumes on subjects in which they take no interest or which they positively dislike. Even the most voracious reader must accept

Bacon's maxim: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested."

In one of his delightful essays, Charles Lamb denounces the books which are no books—*biblia a-biblia*—"things in books' clothing perched upon shelves, like false saints, usurpers of true shrines, intruders into the sanctuary." He goes on to say: "In this catalogue I reckon Court Calendars, Directories, Pocket Books, Draught Boards, bound and lettered on the back, Scientific Treatises, Almanacs, Statutes at Large: the works of Hume, Gibbon, Robertson, Beattie, Soame Jenyns, and generally, all those volumes which 'no gentleman's library should be without': the Histories of Josephus (that learned Jew), and Paley's Moral Philosophy. With these exceptions, I can read almost anything."

Nevertheless Lamb was too sagacious and too fastidious to squander his wits on wholesale reading. Elsewhere he

declared that when he heard of a new book he forthwith began to read some old book over again. And that points us to one practical criterion. In literature, as well as in nature, there goes on a constant struggle for existence, which secures the survival of authors fittest to survive. Every ancient book which is alive to-day persists by virtue of some inherent vitality in its pages. Fashions fluctuate and tastes vary, but against the catholic judgment of mankind there can be no appeal. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum.* When our Neo-Georgians complain that they find Homer tedious and Virgil insipid and Dante benighted and Shakespeare out of date and Milton unreadable, they may be left to their own perversity. The world knows better, and in such verdicts this wise world of ours is mostly right.

What Keeps a Book Evergreen ?

It is worth while to consider what are

those essential qualities in a book by virtue of which it remains evergreen for ages, while generations of its rivals vanish like withered leaves. Books often become immensely popular when they appeal to some passing interest or curiosity, when they reflect the mood of the age or please the humour of the crowd. But the history of literature proves that for any book to succeed permanently it must correspond to some demand which has a permanent place in human life and experience. To-day we observe, for example, that almost the only works which circulate by millions come within the category of romance. Because for ordinary readers the dry bones of prosaic fact must be touched by an enchanter's wand before they assume any appearance of life, any attribute of love or pity or even hate.

"'But,' you say, 'it is only a romance.'

"True. It is only human life in the

highways and hedges, and in the streets and lanes of the city, with the ceaseless throbbing of its quivering heart; it is only daily life from the workshop, from the court, from the market, and from the stage; it is only kindliness and neighbourhood and child life, and the fresh wind of heaven and the waste of sea and forest, and the sunbreak upon the stainless peaks, and contempt of wrong and pain and death, and the passionate yearning for the face of God, and woman's tears, and woman's self-sacrifice and devotion, and woman's love. Yes, it is only a romance."[1]

The masters of modern romance, Scott and Dickens and Victor Hugo and Tolstoy are essentially humanists. In this they are allied to the kings of literature, to Homer and Shakespeare and Goethe. With the true classics of the world there is no respect of persons; they are concerned with those things which are

[1] J. H. Shorthouse: Preface to *John Inglesant*.

common, with matters of enduring interest which come home to everyone alike and touch the universal heart.

Now there is one Book, and only one, which embraces all the heights and depths of human nature. The Bible belongs to those elemental things—like the sky and the wind and the sea, like bread and wine, like the kisses of little children and tears shed beside the grave—which can never grow stale or out of date, because they are the common heritage of mankind. Common does not mean what is cheap or paltry or vulgar; it means what is universal. But the universal instincts are also the profoundest. The things common to all men are far more important than the things peculiar to some few men. The commonest events—like birth and marriage and death—are the most sacred and tragic of all. "The common mind," as a living author has said, "does not mean the inferior mind; it means the

mind of all the artists and heroes, or else it would not be common. Plato had the common mind ; Dante had the common mind. Commonness means the quality common to the sinner and the saint, to the philosopher and the fool—the quality in which God sees something to love." Our most precious possessions are those simple elemental realities which belong to the texture of man's being ; they form part and parcel of our common nature ; but they go down to the roots of the world. Now the Bible is as catholic as the blood in men's veins and the milk in women's breasts. It deals with the naked facts [1] of existence. It moves among primitive things like hunger and labour and love and duty and sorrow and shame and parting. Such things appear homely and commonplace, but they are the stuff out of

[1] " The Bible is outspoken about facts, and rightly. It is because the world is pruriently and stupidly shamefaced that it cannot come into contact with the Bible without convulsions." George Meredith : *Letters I* : 237.

which our life is fashioned; and aged men and women turn back to brood over them, and to feel that in such things as these lie the real problems after all.

Further, we observe that the Bible is not only most catholic, it is also most heart-searching and profound. It takes for granted that this life of ours is a serious and responsible business which involves the gravest issues. The Bible makes hardly any appeal to men of shallow character or cynical spirit. Some superior persons read it after the fashion of the Master of Ballantrae in Stevenson's story: "He tasted the merits of the work like the connoisseur he was; and would sometimes take it from my hand, and turn the leaves over like a man that knew his way . . . But it was singular how little he applied his reading to himself; it passed high above his head like summer thunder: the tales of David's generosity, the psalms of his penitence, the solemn questions of the

Book of Job, the touching poetry of Isaiah—they were to him a source of entertainment only, like the scraping of a fiddle in a change-house." Now to such a reader the Scriptures cannot convey their message, because he has shut his eyes to the great gulf fixed between right and wrong. Beyond any other book this Book appeals to man's conscience; it assumes that he is a responsible being, capable of boundless better or boundless worse. The whole Bible depends upon one tremendous postulate—that the difference between righteousness and iniquity is the deepest difference in the world.

To-day, however, superficial views of life are out of date: they have been shattered by stern reality. We have survived the most terrible of all wars, and we must carry to our graves the scars of that fiery trial. Our generation, moreover, stands face to face with realism in literature and in art.

Realistic plays and novels and pictures set out to show us the bare truth of things; they profess to peel off the rind of decorous convention and expose what lies under the smooth surface. What has been the net result? A fresh apocalypse of evil. After the dust and the stench subside, it may be found that modern realism has borne witness mainly to one ancient and enduring fact. It testifies that deep down in human nature lies a dreadful moral perversion—which is somehow against nature after all.

Long ago St. Paul quoted certain of their own poets to convince the Athenians. Certain of our own novelists and dramatists—including not a few of the most powerful and the most popular—combine to demonstrate this grim truth, which the Bible takes for granted. And their testimony is the more decisive because it is given unawares. They represent the recoil from authors like Jane Austen, who confessed: "Let other pens dwell

on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can." The realists rush to the opposite extreme. They set themselves to tear away the mask from the face of truth, and they have exposed an abyss of iniquity. We may cite one example out of many. In the foremost ranks of modern literature stands the name of Balzac. Some would shrink from classing him with Christian writers. But at any rate Balzac appears "among the greatest of those who have explored the hidden things of darkness." His novels show us the mysterious wages of sin, the tremendous pursuit of retribution, the slow-gathering coils of fate, the consuming shame and pain of personal wrong-doing. It would be easy to multiply illustrations. The nineteenth century, according to a discerning critic, produced two supreme works of original imagination: one was *Les Misérables*, by Victor Hugo, and the other was *The Ring and the Book*, by Robert

Browning. Now both these amazing works exhibit moral evil as an awful reality—not an error of judgment, not an outcome of unhappy circumstances, but the most obstinate fact of experience. Both lift up their voices to proclaim the corruption of man's heart.

On this point we need not appeal to ecclesiastics or schoolmen or Puritans. We need only listen to the masters of literature, "the dead but sceptred sovereigns who still rule our spirits from their urns." They have measured what humanity is capable of, and they do not believe in a shallow heaven or a shallow hell. They know better than to describe sin as a mistaken quest for perfection. Go to the chief among those who have sounded the abysmal deeps of personality, and search *Macbeth* and *Othello* and *King Lear* to discover whether remorse in the soul be not a deathless worm and a quenchless fire.

Of all books the Bible is most profound

because it deals with this deep original wound in human nature. It searches down into the black pit of man's evil and misery. It is concerned with our darkest problems, and it faces them with absolute seriousness and sincerity. It speaks with accents which are not of this world. It teaches us about those things which matter most, the only things which really matter in the end. When Sir Walter Scott lay on his death-bed, he begged his son-in-law to read to him. "What book shall I read?" asked Lockhart. "What book?" said the dying man, "there is only one Book."

Among the classics of humanity, there is one Book which towers high above all the rest. We have been born and bred under the shadow of the Bible. We live so close beneath it that we fail to measure its vastness. This is why our comments on Scripture are mostly meagre, and mis-proportioned, and

grotesquely out of scale. This is why current criticisms and disputes about the Bible often sound like wranglings among a crowd of Bedouin who have pitched their tents by the base of the Great Pyramid.

The function of history is to unfold the part played by men, institutions, and groups of events, in the development of the human spirit.—BENEDETTO CROCE.

BOUND up between the covers of the Bible we find no fewer than sixty separate portions. Some of these books were written by more than one author, or they embody earlier documents, or they underwent various revisions before they reached their present form. The most ancient sections—as, for example, the Song of Deborah—are over three thousand years old; the latest sections of the New Testament are perhaps not much more than eighteen hundred years old. Thus, the different parts of the Bible were composed at intervals during a period of about twelve hundred years.

Now these books of Scripture have come down to us as the result of a long

process of selection, which went on through century after century. In primitive days, when writing was a rare and difficult art, only such things as men felt to have enduring value would get recorded. Our word "Scripture," which simply means something written, points back to the time when every writing appeared to be memorable and authoritative. "Now go," cried the Hebrew prophet, "write it in a table and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever." The mere fact that an ancient law, or poem, or prophetic oracle was written down at all, implied that it was considered more precious and sacred than many other similar things which were not thought worthy of being inscribed on parchment or engraved on stone.

Moreover the preservation of a book through long centuries meant that it was copied again and again, or at any rate that a single copy was treasured and

guarded and handed down with extreme care. In early ages men would do this only for books which they prized and revered very highly. Indeed, it is plain that numbers of ancient religious documents must have perished. The Old Testament mentions several Hebrew writings which we no longer possess, and the New Testament refers to epistles of St. Paul which have been lost. The Bible, as we know it, represents the result of a long and wonderful evolution ; and the books which it preserves, written at sundry times and in divers manners, have reached us as the survival of the fittest. "The Bible grew, the Koran was made," said Matthew Arnold ; and herein lies part of the immense difference in depth and truth between them.

Yet to gain an adequate idea of the Bible, we must not merely take account of its gradual growth ; we must grasp its broad purport and intention. It is not enough to enquire how these sixty

parts, so different in date and literary form, came to be bound up together. We must discover what justifies their connexion, what coherence and unity they exhibit as a whole. Let us open the Bible, and lay aside our theories about it, and read it as far as possible apart from prejudices and preconceptions. At first sight it looks like a multifarious bundle of early Eastern literature, which includes documents of all sorts and shapes. In some parts of the Old Testament we recognise primeval myths and legends and Semitic folk-lore. We find also tribal traditions and national chronicles. We find a composite code of ancient laws, blended with rules of primitive ritual. We find many prophetic oracles, a number of moral precepts, and a collection of sacred hymns. Variegated features like these appear on the surface of the Old Testament.

Nevertheless, when we read the Bible connectedly and receive the total

impression of its content, we become aware that it is altogether unlike other ancient books. Because throughout its parts and portions it is occupied with one dominant subject. That subject is God, and God's relation to men. The Bible is supremely concerned with questions which go down to the ground of our existence. Is there One living God? Is this Maker and Ruler of all things really just and holy and compassionate? Does He care for His creatures? Has He actually come into human history, to purify men and lift them into fellowship with Himself? Is there any life after death in store for each one of us and for our race? From first to last the Bible is dealing with these vital questions; and, for beings such as we are, nothing can be more momentous than the answers.

Now the Bible provides answers to these questions mainly by narratives of personal experience. It is filled with accounts of God's personal intercourse

with men—how He has spoken to men, and what He has done for men, and what He has enabled men to become and to achieve. The characteristic feature of Scripture is the way in which it discloses the converse of God with men, the intimacy between men and God. It is chiefly a record of religious experiences. Its words are like "a window into the souls of men who penned them," and we recognise these penmen as souls whose life was rooted in communion with the living God. One increasing purpose runs through the whole volume. In the Bible, and in the Bible alone, we find God drawing near to mankind, preparing a chosen people to receive His message, gradually unfolding His nature and His will, and manifesting at last His inmost Self in Jesus Christ. We can never do justice to Scripture unless we recognise that it contains the personal history of God's gracious dealings with men from age

to age, until finally the Eternal Father unveils His very heart in the person of His Son.

This record of God's gradual manifestation of Himself comes to us preserved in literature. It is true that the books of Scripture, which present such varieties of age and authorship and outward form, must be examined by the tests of historic and literary criticism. It is true also that they are ancient literature, and not modern science. Yet when we read these books in their proper sequence they fall into one scheme of philosophic history. Their philosophy centres in the religious conception of Israel as the elect Nation, ordained to receive and represent the One true God to the other nations of the world, that through Israel all mankind may be blessed. The Old Testament shows us stages in the fortunes of this Nation, chosen to be the earthen vessel which holds the heavenly treasure. The Hebrew prophets discern in history

a supreme Providence, ordering the movements of pagan empires and peoples so that by their contact with Israel they serve as God's instruments for the discipline of His elect. In the captivity the river of Israel's progress runs underground, and when it reappears the Chosen Nation has become the Jewish Church, with its priests and scribes cherishing the religion of the Law. The sense of Israel's world-wide mission recedes and grows faint, until a new era begins with the advent of Christ and men learn that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Viewed from this commanding standpoint, "the books of Scripture draw together with a connectedness like the unity of a dramatic poem." It is as though some profound and complex piece of music, some vast oratorio, has resulted from a long succession of strains, each in itself fragmentary. The broad basis of their connexion is nothing less than a philosophy of world history, in the

conception of a Chosen Race, trained through generations to receive God's gradual revelation of Himself and to become the medium for that revelation to reach mankind.

The whole Bible is built upon this principle of historic development. When we turn to other sacred writings, venerated in India or China or Arabia, we observe that their earliest portions are confessedly the noblest, while in their later portions ritual obscures and overpowers the strivings after personal fellowship with God. In the Bible, on the other hand, we have an ever-expanding revelation, growing with man's growth and unfolding as man's power to apprehend it waxed stronger. When we realize this progressive character of Scripture we hold the key to explain many of its apparent enigmas and contradictions. In the Old Testament we find acts of immorality and atrocity recorded often without rebuke and even

with approval. Such records have proved stumbling blocks to devout Christians, besides furnishing pabulum for mocking critics like Voltaire. But such records only help us to measure the pit out of which Israel was digged. Not every reader of an ancient book can make proper allowance for the lapse of two or three thousand years. To appreciate the books of Scripture aright, we must be alive to the fact—which no anthropologist fails to remember—that they were addressed originally to a race altogether unlike ours, living on a far different level of civilization and morality. This will become clearer by the aid of a few concrete illustrations.

The Bible describes successive stages in the stern discipline under which wild Hebrew nomads were tamed and shaped and hardened and tempered into a distinct nation, unlike any of their neighbours—a nation which survives to-day as the most uncompromising and

indomitable race in the world. The Bible shows us how slowly and painfully Israel mastered the alphabet of true religion which is enshrined in the first and the second commandments spoken at Sinai. First came the foundation truth that God is One, in contrast with the crowd of false gods worshipped by their heathen rivals. Then followed the further truth that God is a Spirit, not to be confounded with graven images fashioned by human hands. He may not be represented by any likeness or form ; He may not be worshipped under any symbol or shape. We are sometimes told that these Hebrews must have been constitutionally monotheists, with a natural genius for spiritual religion. But the Hebrew prophets believed otherwise ; they declare again and again that their people are peculiarly prone to fall away from their invisible King and to worship idols like all the peoples round about them.

To us it seems an obvious axiom that

God must needs be perfect Goodness. But the Bible shows how passionately the prophets of Israel had to reiterate this truth that Jahveh is holy—a God who loves righteousness and hates iniquity—in contrast with cruel, monstrous demons like Moloch and Baal and Ashtoroth, whom surrounding tribes were propitiating with rites often too foul for plain description to-day. The burning rage of the prophets against Israel's lapses into idolatry was a moral fervour against the corruption which idolatry entailed. We can trace in Scripture how the Hebrew faith in the spiritual goodness of God grew stronger and clearer through generations that experienced His mingled judgments and mercies; how this faith was purged from superstitions and illusions, until it rose into the worship of those Psalms which we need never hope to excel.

In the early dawn of history we discover that human sacrifices were far

from uncommon. Primitive men stood by their smoking altars and asked the dreadful question: "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" But the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah meant at least this—that no human victim must be slain as an offering to Abraham's God. In the Old Testament we find animal sacrifices prescribed and regulated as acts of worship. Yet in the spiritual progress of generations the great prophets and psalmists learned and taught a loftier truth. In place of the blood of bulls and goats, shed to appease the wrath of the Most High or to win His favour, they insisted that He requires in His worshippers a contrite heart and a consecrated life. While the New Testament reveals that earthly oblations are superseded and the sins of the world taken away by the eternal self-sacrifice of God.

Throughout the earlier history of Israel, group-morality prevailed : the family, or the tribe, or the nation, was regarded as the moral unit, rather than the individual. This explains the doom inflicted on the whole family of Achan, and on the sons and grandsons of Saul ; and the penalty which fell upon all Israel for their king's act in taking a census. In such cases the unit dealt with is not the guilty person but the group he belongs to, which he has involved in the consequences of his crime. It was one great contribution to the progress of Hebrew religion made by Jeremiah and Ezekiel that they emphasized the direct relation of the individual soul to God, and declared each man to be personally responsible for his own sin.

Space would fail us did we multiply illustrations of this spiritual development from crude, half-savage beginnings, which may be traced in the record of Scripture. When we remember that Semitic clans-

men looked upon revenge as a sacred duty and pursued their vendettas as ruthlessly as Corsicans or Afghans, we realize that Moses took a great step towards restraining such fierce vendettas by appointing cities of refuge for asylums where the man who had slain his fellow by accident would be safe from the avenger of blood. So the elaborate ceremonial laws in the Pentateuch become more intelligible when we learn that some of them at least were rules of wise sanitary reform. So also we gain a clue to the strange taboos in Leviticus against eating "unclean" creatures, when we discover that some of those forbidden creatures were the totems of heathen tribes, eaten ceremonially in heathen sacramental feasts. Hence, for a Hebrew to eat such flesh would be an act of religious apostasy. When our own Saxon ancestors landed in Kent, their totem was a sacred horse which they ate only at pagan festivals. Therefore,

in those days for a British Christian to eat horse-flesh would be to deny Christ ; and the aversion to this particular kind of meat still survives in England.

Consider for a moment the fundamental institution of marriage. The Old Testament sanctions polygamy, though it illustrates again and again what strife and bitterness polygamy can breed in a household. But the New Testament confronts us with the lofty ideal of Christian wedlock, enforced by commands which are far too stringent for many modern Christians in Europe and in America.

The Old Testament, again, reveals little or nothing that is definite about man's future beyond the grave. Whereas Christ has brought immortality to light in the Gospel. Every line of the New Testament was written after Easter, and its pages are radiant with the powers and glories of the world to come.

The Bible stands high above other

ancient books in its insistence that true religion can never be divorced from morality. Accordingly we find that the development of religious faith involved a corresponding progress in ethics. What an immense distance we travel upwards from the sons of Jacob treacherously slaughtering the population of Shechem to our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan! What an advance from Elijah's massacre of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel to the Sermon on the Mount where Christ taught men to love their enemies!

This moral and spiritual progress is characteristic of the Bible. No other book is so full of unspeakable promise. From the outset, Scripture moves on a tide of forward-looking thoughts. Echoing through the Hebrew Psalms we can hear a long, slow music of preparation and suspense. The Hebrew prophets set their faces towards the sunrise; they are inspired and possessed by immense expectancy. The

Chosen Race lived on and endured for ages in hope of their promised Deliverer; until at last the mighty hope came true, and God's promise was fulfilled in One Who literally beggared all expectations. When we set aside questions of detail, this towering correspondence stands out beyond dispute. There is, on the one hand, Israel's undying dream cherished through so many centuries: there is, on the other hand, that dream's fulfilment in Him Whom after-generations have been worshipping as Divine.

The development which we have roughly sketched went on through ages of actual history. God's revelation has been given in life, wrought out step by step in the life of a race, and completed in that Life which is the light of men. The Bible is not like the Koran, oracles delivered to some single individual in an ecstatic fever. It is no mere collection of the dreams of ascetics brooding in silence and solitude. It is a Divine

Word, unfolded and applied amid the varied practical conditions of national and personal growth through a thousand years. Now the proof of any theory lies in its application to facts, which it must explain and group together. The truth given us in the Bible is truth written with the heart's blood of a people, truth tested by the hard facts of human experience, truth exhibited in historic reality. Plato's Republic has been called a pen-and-ink State, an ideal invented to illustrate the lessons which the philosopher desired to teach. The truth revealed in Scripture emerges as it was actually lived out by generations of men and women ; and it culminates in One Who lived and died on this earth of ours, and is Himself alive for evermore.

To sum up the present chapter let me borrow some sentences from J. R. Seeley. The marvellous thing about the Bible is not a special passage here and there, not points which only a

scholar or antiquarian can detect, but the Bible as a whole. The outstanding feature of Scripture is its series of "successive revelations covering many centuries, and its doctrine of an Eternal God Who from age to age makes new announcements of His will." "That which is peculiar to the Bible, and has caused it to be spoken of as one book rather than many—the unity reigning through a work upon which so many generations laboured—gives it a vastness beyond all comparison, so that the greatest work of individual literary genius shows by the side of it like some building of human hands beside the Peak of Teneriffe."

III The Charter of Christendom

"Le livre où Dieu se rend visible."—VICTOR HUGO.

WE know, as a matter of fact, that Christendom cherishes sacred books which all Christians regard as possessing a unique character and value. When we call our religion a historic faith, we mean that it is based upon certain events which happened in human history—events which convey what Christians believe to be the revelation of God Himself. The Old Testament describes how, in God's redemptive purpose, an elect nation prepared the way for the Advent. The New Testament records how in the fulness of time Christ came to complete this Divine beginning, how He lived and taught and suffered and rose again, and how He affected the people of His generation. Now on these great matters the Old and New

Testaments contain our chief and often our only data of information. And so Christianity has been called the religion of the Bible.

Yet such a phrase may provoke objections. How can spiritual religion depend upon documents? Surely it is like music, or like the fragrance of flowers—something so rare and subtle and penetrating that no mere writing can ever embody its essence or enshrine its aroma. From the nature of the case, is not genuine faith too inward, too exalted, for printed pages to convey? How can it be bound up with a book?

When we consider, however, we realize that without a writing of some kind or other there can be no sufficient record of the passing generations. We need a vehicle more secure than mere tradition to hand down the knowledge gained in one epoch to the men who follow afterwards. If each age is not to start afresh from childish rudiments, if those

who succeed are to inherit aught from those who went before, if manhood and maturity are to become possible for the race, it seems plain that written records are indispensable ; they are one necessary condition of social and scientific progress in the world. Now the same holds good in regard to religion. If deep spiritual truths were revealed or reasserted in some great epoch, they could not be transmitted unimpaired to future centuries apart from a written record—that is to say, apart from a Scripture. There are corrosive forces which affect oral tradition, even when its guardians honestly try to hand it on without change or alloy. The Bible is part of the great tradition of Christianity which has descended to us out of the past. But it forms the vital and critical part of that tradition. In the New Testament we possess testimony closely related to the events. By such witness we can test anything else which claims to be

Christian and determine whether the claim is legitimate, whether it is really in keeping with the original manifestation of God and with the original life of faith which that manifestation produced. If anything connected with vital Christianity be absent from the New Testament, we must begin to revise our ideas of what is "vital." History warns us again and again, how deeply corrupt, how overlaid with error, a Church may become which relies for its purity of faith and morals on an official hierarchy, divorced from Scripture.

When we are reminded that it is the function of the Church to teach and the function of the Bible to prove, we may accept this dictum if we also remember that the Church itself must learn as well as teach. And the Church learns in so far as it responds to the Spirit of truth, which saves it alike from rigid adherence to custom and from facile acceptance of passing philosophies. But only so long

as the Church remains loyal to the proportion of faith and the ideal of life taught in the New Testament, can it grow wise to meet men's changing needs by reinterpreting the changeless Gospel. The New Testament writings themselves are attempts to meet the needs of the primitive Christian communities—not merely Jewish, but Greek and Roman and Syrian—scattered along the Mediterranean shores. Those writings sanction the presentation of the one faith in various forms, to answer the diverse experiences and wants of human life. But the supreme office of the New Testament in each and all its parts is to set forth Him to Whom they all bear witness. The New Testament as a whole stands for one dominating fact—the fact of Christ: Christ for all men in all times.

God's manifestation of Himself has culminated in the living Person of Christ. But if this manifestation is to remain a

permanent power in the world, it is not enough that the saving influences flowing from Christ's Person should be transmitted through generation after generation of His followers, so that the Church could take His place and become His sufficient representative. It is necessary that each generation should be brought directly under the influence of the Revealer and Redeemer Himself. And this is only possible through a record, fixed in writing while His eye-witnesses were still alive. Without such an original record—breathing the fresh life of the age from which it flows—we could have no such lively vision of the events as to feel ourselves in Christ's very presence. For revelation does not merely impart religious truth ; it is personal in its very essence. We must have such a record of revelation as may serve as the medium to bring us into personal contact with Christ Himself.

All Christians confess that the glory

of God has been made manifest in the Face of Jesus Christ. Yet apart from the Gospel record, that Face has no outline, no expression, no reality: it melts into a legend, it dissolves into a sentimental dream. What does the name "Jesus Christ" stand for? It stands for nothing—unless it means that Person Whose life and teaching and death and rising from the dead were written down by the evangelists, and attested and expounded by the apostles. This is why Christianity can be called the religion of the Bible.

The Church and the Canon.

We have already pointed out that the volume of Scripture grew gradually. Each book must have won for itself a specially sacred place, before it came to be included in successive collections of books held in unique religious reverence —that is to say, in successive editions of the Bible. The Old Testament comprises

three distinct groups, with histories of their own. Before the Pentateuch assumed its present shape, it passed through several revisions. Many of the prophetical and historical books, or portions of books, existed and gained authority before the Pentateuch took final form ; but this " Book of the Law " was first recognized as the Jewish Bible, and it has always been esteemed by the Jews more highly than the rest of their Scriptures. The Prophets, together with Joshua, Judges, and the Books of Samuel and Kings formed a second collection, made somewhat later. The remaining books became ultimately incorporated into a third collection, though the question as to exactly what it should include was left unsettled. The Jews of Palestine limited their Canon, or List of Sacred Books, to those now found in our English Old Testament ; but the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria practically, if not formally, added other

books which we know as the Old Testament Apocrypha. Even in the Christian Church the precise limits of the Old Testament remained more or less an open question. After the Reformation, however, the Protestant Churches generally adopted the Canon of Palestine, while the Roman and Eastern Churches retained the Old Testament Apocrypha.

The earliest Christians were Jews, or Jewish proselytes, who had inherited the Old Testament as their Bible. Soon, however, God's fresh revelation of Himself in Christ began to create records of its own. Before long the primitive Church recognized that certain Christian documents, like the Gospels and the Epistles, possessed the same unique quality and value as the books of Hebrew Scripture. Hence a new collection came into existence, which for Christians ranked in authority with the earlier Canon. The New Testament was formed, as the Old Testament had been formed, by the *sensus communis* of

an intensely religious community. The early Christian Church, like the Jewish Church after the exile, lived by ardent spiritual conviction ; and this produced, more or less consciously, a corporate spiritual instinct which in the end selected and preserved the contents of the New Testament. Ultimately the two Testaments together made up the Christian Bible.

Humanly speaking, a book became included in the Bible, partly because of the religious authority which attached to the name of its writer, but mainly because of the religious impression which the book itself made upon men. Now to recognize religious values requires that we distinguish between various degrees and gradations of spiritual quality. Some books, like the Psalter and the Epistle to the Romans secured emphatic and unanimous acceptance. In the case of other books, like Esther and Tobit and the Second Epistle of Peter and the

Apocalypse, recognition was hesitating and partial; they were books on the borderline, about which opinion and usage varied. In the end it became needful to decide definitely which books should be reckoned as Canonical. This was done in the first instance by various Jewish authorities for the Old Testament, and later on by various Christian authorities for the Bible as a whole. The so-called New Testament Apocrypha comprise certain works, like the Epistle of Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas, which were accepted for awhile by some early Christian communities, but in the end were excluded from Scripture by general consent.

Thus we receive the Bible through the Church, which—to quote the Anglican Articles of Religion—is a witness and keeper of Holy Writ, but has no power to decree anything against the same. The Scriptures represent, in fact, the title-deeds of the Church, to which it appeals

and of which it is the custodian. Every Christian Communion, including the Roman, has accepted the Bible as its charter. St. Thomas Aquinas in one of the opening sentences of his famous *Summa* declares that "our faith rests on the revelation made to the prophets and apostles who wrote the Canonical Books, not on such revelations as may have been made to other teachers." Every medieval theologian would have maintained that the whole doctrinal system of his Church was based upon Scripture.[1]

God's Voice in the Bible.

Nevertheless, we have to recognize that the Bible is far greater than an encyclopedia of religious truths, or a text-book of doctrines, or a canon of ecclesiastical laws, or even a code of Christian morality. Because, as has been

[1] It was not until the Council of Trent that the Roman Church affirmed the full co-ordination of *traditiones sine scripto* with Holy Scripture.

already pointed out, the Bible is distinguished from other books by its history of the living, personal converse between God and man. The story of God's grace is expounded to us by psalmists and prophets and apostles, as they realized it in their own lives. Thus the record of revelation becomes, so to speak, the autobiography of the earliest Church.

This point is so vital and central that it must be considered more at length. Although we cannot analyse or explain personality, we learn by our own experience that the relations of person to person are the deepest realities of human life. And it is possible for one human soul to penetrate into another with such full appreciation and sympathy as to render faith in that other something far more profound than any balancing of probabilities. Now faith of this kind lies at the root of Christianity. For the promise which Christianity holds out to men sunk in selfishness and misery is the

promise of entering into new personal fellowship with God. But our Christian consciousness of God rests on His historical manifestation of Himself. Personal fellowship is always based on personal action and reaction. Men must know that God is dealing with them in person, and must willingly submit to God's influence and working. And it is this personal action of God on man, consciously exerted and consciously responded to, which runs like a golden thread through the whole texture of the Bible. Scripture is the record of those historical acts in which God has made Himself known. Yet what God reveals is simply Himself—His own being and character and His inmost disposition towards men. And so the immediate object of faith is not a system of truths about God, but God Himself. The Bible shows us how from the earliest times God has been dealing personally with mankind, through successive stages of a history which

culminates in Christ. Each manifestation of God prepared the way for a higher, until in the fulness of time God Himself became man, in final Self-manifestation, and incorporated Himself in the life and destiny of mankind.

Moreover for men to recognize God in the Person of Christ, it is also needful that by the inner operation of His Spirit He should enlighten their consciousness to apprehend His manifestation aright. Scripture is the medium through which we come face to face with Christ ; and being thus brought under the living influence of His Person, we are enabled by the Divine Spirit to approach and apprehend Him as indeed Divine. Because to apprehend a reality of this kind, you need a sympathetic faculty to correspond ; just as you must have an ear for music or an eye for colour before you can appreciate a concert or a picture gallery. So only the Spirit of God within you can make you realize that it is indeed

God, and no one else, Who speaks in the prophets, and Who opens His heart and declares His will in His Son. "The things of God knoweth no man, save the Spirit of God." Only as we obey His Spirit and enter into His purpose, are we able to appreciate the inner meaning and truth of Scripture and to recognize the authority of the revelation which it contains.

Christianity has always claimed to be the religion of the Bible. Down through the middle ages—as we shall see in a subsequent chapter—this Book was by no means ignored or forgotten. It remained, however, for the most part in the hands of priests and monks. Its text was overlaid with traditions, and obscured by scholastic and allegorical exegesis. The Church's liturgies and psalmody were full of the words of Scripture; but those words had to filter through ecclesiastical interpretations before they could reach ordinary folk.

The Reformation came about as the result of what was practically a rediscovery of the Bible. At the Renaissance, it has been said that Greece arose from the dead with the New Testament in her hand. But now that New Testament learned to speak in the vulgar tongue, and by means of the printer's craft began to find its way into the homes and hearts of common people. Luther's German translation is a landmark, because it first made the printed Bible popular, and because it became the pioneer and parent of similar versions in many other countries.

The Reformers did nothing heretical, nothing opposed to the theory of the Church in which they had been born and brought up, when they made their confident appeal to Scripture; and at least, to begin with, their opponents never challenged their right to make such an appeal. But to these Reformers, the Bible was a personal, rather than a

doctrinal revelation. They appealed to its record on the ground of their own personal experience of what the Scriptures had been to them. They had felt and known that the God Who had made them and redeemed them was speaking to them through His Book, and assuring them of His love and His power to save, and giving them pardon and peace and joy. Thus for the Reformers Scripture had a new position and value. They held that the Bible was simple enough for any honest reader to discover therein all that is essential for his salvation. With this Book in his hand, a plain man could hear his Father's voice and learn his Redeemer's purpose and trust his Lord's promises. So they encouraged every man to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the Bible for himself—because it had a message addressed to him personally. They said in effect to the common people: "Here is the "open secret of Christian faith. The

" written Gospel can pierce your con-
" sciences and rouse eternal echoes in your
" hearts, and authenticate itself in your
" deepest experience. Have ye never
" read ? "

This changed way of regarding the Scriptures may be appreciated by an illustration. We possess a late Greek manuscript of the Gospels, which is curiously written in several colours to distinguish the words of Christ, of His disciples, of His enemies, and of the evangelists. The narrative of each evangelist appears in green ink, the words of the Pharisees and other opponents of our Lord are in black ink, the words of the disciples are in blue, while the sayings of Christ Himself are in red. With this manuscript von Dobschütz contrasts a German family Bible, described by a modern preacher. It is a plain old printed Bible, but the pious grandfather had marked its verses all through with various colours, which he thus explained

in a note : " What touched the sin of my heart—Black. What inspired me to good —Blue. What comforted me in sorrow —Red. What promised me the grace of God in eternity—Gold." The contrast is obvious between apprehending objective facts and personally appreciating their inward power. This new attitude characterized Protestant readers of the Scriptures, and therefore the Bible became far more to them than it had been to most medieval Christians.

It followed that the great fathers of the Reformed Church held a nobler and saner doctrine about the Bible than some of their children. What was the authority of Scripture to Luther? It was " the subject matter of the Word of God, which, however its forms of expression may vary, is able to attest itself to men's hearts by its own inherent power." [1] So Calvin wrote : " The question ' how

[1] Dorner : *History of Protestant Theology,* English trans. I 231.

shall we be persuaded of the divine original of Scripture?' . . . is just as if any one should enquire, 'how shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter?' For the Scripture exhibits as clear evidence of its truth as white and black things do of their colour, or sweet and bitter things of their taste." . . . "As God alone is a sufficient witness of Himself in His own Word, so also the Word will never gain credit in the hearts of men, till it be confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit." [1]

The same position was held a century later by John Owen, a prince among Puritan theologians. Though he maintained a rigid theory of inspiration, Owen asked for no external warrant of Biblical authority. "The Scriptures," he says, "are Light and Power . . . Light manifests itself and requires no further proof nor testimony for its evidence. . . .

[1] *Institutes*; I, 7.

Whatever it be that hath an innate power in itself, is able to evidence itself and its own nature and condition. . . . So doth fire by its heat, salt by its taste and savour, and the sun by its light." [1]

The strength of the Reformers lay in their spiritual understanding and use of the Bible. They discovered there nothing else but God's living Gospel, and so the Book became in their hands a new and wonderful weapon. Their mighty hold on the secret of Scripture has been excellently expressed by Robertson Smith, who, on this point at least, revived their original teaching as to the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti:* "If I am asked why I receive Scripture as the Word of God and as the only perfect rule of faith and life, I answer with all the fathers of the Protestant Church, *Because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in*

[1] Owen's *Works*, xvi, 319, 323.

Christ Jesus, and declaring to us in Him His will for our salvation. And this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul."

Here is the grand distinction between the Bible and all other books. A Divine Voice may be heard murmuring in confused whispers and echoes through many a poet and philosopher of ancient and modern time. But in the Scriptures that Voice grows clear and full and articulate and distinct and unmistakable until it speaks at last in One who embodies its whole meaning and message in Himself. The difference is a difference in degree, so great as to become practically like a difference in kind.

The proof of this distinctive quality of the Bible must, from the nature of the case, be an inward and spiritual proof. If a man fails to appreciate its force, no argument can bring it home to his mind.

If someone professes that God speaks to him more plainly and purely in the Vedas than in the Psalms, or that he recognizes the character of Mahomet to be more divine than the character of Jesus, further discussion is futile : argument is out of place—as it would be with any one who considered Chinese perspective truer than European, or Southey a greater poet than Shakespeare. We can only reply that these things depend upon perception, and that the experts in art and in poetry are agreed the other way. Similarly we can fortify our own sense of the spiritual authority of Scripture by the consensus of spiritual experts. The men and women of highest holiness and clearest insight have paid homage most freely to the Bible, because they have recognized in it that unique and permanent element without which it would be no Bible—the revelation of God's character and the declaration of His redeeming love.

As an outcome of this practical experience, Christians often call the Bible "the Word of God." When they use the phrase, they are naturally thinking about those parts of the Bible in which they have found God speaking to them and giving them life and pardon and joy.[1] That name does not scientifically describe the various contents of Scripture. But it does substantially represent the religious value of the Bible taken as a whole. For "the Word of God is nothing else than the personal expression to us of God and His will for our salvation. And the end and object of Scripture are to convey to us this message of redeeming

[1] "The use of the term 'Word of God' for the whole Bible is not Biblical. In the Old Testament that term is applied chiefly to particular declarations of the purposes and promises of God, especially to those made by the prophets; in the New Testament 'the Word of God' denotes commonly the Gospel message, the tidings of salvation proclaimed first upon the lips of the Saviour and carried afterwards by His apostles to the different quarters of the globe. But it is never applied to the historical books of either Testament or to the Wisdom literature, or even to the Psalms."—Driver: *Sermons on Subjects connected with the Old Testament*, p. 159.

love, which the witness of the Spirit attests to be God's infallible Word." Hence many Christians have said, Scripture *is* the infallible Word of God—it is, essentially, that which it is its business to convey. But we must never invert the proposition, and argue that the perfection of the Divine substance extends to its outward form; or that the self-evidencing power of Scripture in matters of faith guarantees anything in Scripture which is indifferent to our salvation. Too often Christians forget that the Bible does not exist to teach anything that man can teach himself.

At any rate, the spiritual authority of the Bible does not in the least forbid us to examine its literary structure. How the various books were actually composed and edited, and what marks they bear of change and revision, and whether they come to us accurate in names and dates and details, are problems of ancient literature to be dealt with by study and

research. When once we realize that the heavenly treasure is not identical with its earthen vessels, we can examine with an open mind such questions as how far the Jewish history and chronology given in Scripture agree with early inscriptions and monuments, or how far the primitive ideas about science in the Bible correspond with modern discovery. None of these things move us. They do not touch the religious value and sufficiency of the book. They lie apart from our certainty that the Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, even though they leave us ignorant of everything else beside. For the Bible has one supreme and practical object. It never pretends to solve all mysteries, or to contain a scientific explanation of the universe. Still less does it claim verbal inerrancy. It does claim to carry God's word of love and redemption from His own heart to our hearts; and so long as it brings this home to us, it does its sacred work, in

comparison with which nothing else seriously matters.

The self-evidencing authority of the Bible is conclusive within its own sphere. From the nature of the case, it resides in the substance which Scripture embodies, and not in any accidents and accessories of that embodiment. It attaches to Scripture only as the record of God's saving manifestation of Himself: the witness of the Spirit can certify us of nothing apart from that. The value of the kernel is not to be confused with the outward form of its husk. Even though the Scriptures had come down to us, like the mythical Book of Mormon, engraved by angels on plates of gold, their preciousness would still consist in their intrinsic content and their spiritual authentication. Whether there be defects in the literary vehicle of revelation is a question which cannot be decided *à priori* by our profound sense of the truth of revelation itself.

Yet no one would dream of deducing from the literary phenomena of the Bible the notion that it is necessarily more exempt from mistakes than other ancient writings. The contrary can only be maintained by obscuring or evading these phenomena in the interest of a theory more or less consciously adopted already. Men who have first made up their minds that there ought to be no errors in Scripture often manage to satisfy themselves that no errors exist. But then they begin by mentally begging the question. Their tacit assumption may be reduced to its simplest terms thus : *Since God is perfect, it follows that He must have given us His Word in a perfect form, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing : and to doubt this is to dishonour God.* Now that assumption is so plausible and attractive that it has had power to bias Christian exegesis through long generations. But it is a pure fallacy in logic : and it is contradicted by the actual facts of the

case. A similar assumption lies at the back of Newman's famous argument for an infallible Church, speaking by an infallible mouthpiece. A similar assumption led Christians to argue that God must have created a perfect world; until it was proved by observation that all life in nature is one long struggle towards some better thing.

There is an instructive passage bearing on this point in Helmholtz's *Popular Lectures on Scientific Subjects*, where, after describing the chromatic and spherical aberration of the human eye, he proceeds: "The eye has every possible defect that can be found in an optical instrument, and even some that are peculiar to itself." But our eyes are, after all, not ingenious optical toys but organs made for practical use in this workaday world: and so, judging by the standard of physiological efficiency, Helmholtz finally concludes: "The adaptation of the eye to its function is

most complete, and is seen in the very limits which are set to its defects." The illustration is suggestive. The defects and mistakes in the Bible, considered as a manual of ancient history, do not injure its fitness for its practical end as the master-light of all our seeing; and the Bible has no other end than to convey to us that revelation which, with the witness of the Spirit, authenticates itself as the truth of God.

May we not say further that the adaptation of the Bible to its function is most complete, and is seen in the very limits which are set to its defects as mere history or literature? Hooker put the case luminously when he wrote: "The absolute perfection of Scripture is seen by relation unto that end whereunto it tendeth. Whatsoever to make up the doctrine of man's salvation is added, as in supply of the Scripture's insufficiency, we reject it. Scripture, purposing this, hath perfectly and fully done it . . . We

count those things perfect which want nothing requisite for the end whereunto they were instituted . . . so the Scripture yea every sentence thereof, is perfect, and wanteth nothing requisite unto that purpose for which God delivered the same." [1]

The fallacy of these *à priori* assumptions about the Bible has never been more forcibly exposed than in Bishop Butler's weighty words: "The only question concerning the authority of Scripture is, whether it be what it claims to be, not whether it be a book of such sort and so promulgated as weak men are apt to fancy a book containing a Divine revelation should. And therefore neither obscurity, nor seeming inaccuracy of style, nor various readings, nor early disputes about the authors of particular parts, nor any other things of like kind, though they had been much more considerable in degree than they are,

[1] *Ecclesiastical Polity* II: 8, 5.

could overthrow the authority of the Scripture: unless the prophets, apostles, or our Lord had promised that the Book containing the Divine revelation should be secure from these things." [1]

The closing sentence quoted from Butler suggests what many feel to be the crux of this question. Are not Christians bound to accept the Bible as free from all error on the authority of Christ Himself? For Christians, no authority can compete with His: and we turn reverently to listen to our Lord as He uses the Old Testament. His teaching was in a manner based on it, and steeped in its thoughts and phrases. Its familiar words rose habitually to His lips in their popular acceptation. Apparently He endorsed the Jews' view of their own history, while He recognized the earlier lines of Divine revelation as pointing on and leading up to Himself. Yet in this, as in so much beside, He stooped to put

[1] *Analogy* II: 3.

Himself into the position of His hearers. He quoted the Scriptures as they were then commonly understood. We may believe that, in regard to criticism as in regard to science, He was content to accept the conditions which belonged to His age and nation. We may believe that the Divine self-limitation, by which the Son of God for our sakes became poor, extended to knowledge of the externals of the Old Testament. Yet in Christ's recorded use of the books of Scripture, it is significant how He grasps the spiritual substance which underlies their literary form: He cites them as inspired witnesses to God's Kingdom and God's Messiah. And it is still more striking to hear Him emphasize the defective morality and partial light given by Moses. He criticized not the form but the substance of the Hebrew Scripture with the confidence and freedom of a Superior. Those who listened to the Sermon on the Mount must have felt

within themselves, "A greater than Moses is here." On the whole there seems nothing in our Lord's attitude towards the Old Testament which forbids us to recognize defects or mistakes in its record, if we are shown reason to believe on other grounds that such exist. Yet His example does constrain us to accept the ancient Scriptures as recording a genuine, though a partial and imperfect and progressive revelation from God.

The Meaning of Inspiration.

Such considerations as these teach us how to define what is called the inspiration of the Bible. Inspiration is that quality in Scripture which distinguishes it from ordinary writings. But this resides in the matter and content of its message, not in its language and literary form. Inspiration does not imply that all parts of the Bible are equally valuable: it does not guarantee their authority in

regard to anything but spiritual truth: and even this authority only belongs to Scripture as a whole, checked and corrected and completed and interpreted by itself. In this sober and reasonable sense we can accept the position, held by every Reformed Communion, that Scripture furnishes us with a supreme and sufficient guide in all questions of faith and conduct.

Nevertheless we ought to thank God because this treasure has been given us in earthen vessels. One practical result which follows from the lack of uniformity in Scripture was pointed out by Archbishop Temple. "Had the Bible been drawn up in precise statements of faith, or detailed precepts of conduct, we should have had no alternative but either permanent subjection to an outer law, or loss of the highest instrument of self-education. But the Bible, from its very form, is exactly adapted to our present want. It is a history; even the

doctrinal parts of it are cast in historical form, and are best studied by considering them as records of the time at which each of them was written, and as conveying to us the highest and greatest religious thought of that time. Hence we use the Bible—some consciously, some unconsciously—not to override, but to evoke the voice of conscience. When conscience and the Bible appear to differ, the pious Christian immediately concludes that he has not really understood the Bible. . . . The Bible, in fact, is hindered by its very form from exercising a despotism over the human spirit ; but its form is so admirably adapted to our need that it wins from us all the reverence for a supreme authority, and yet imposes on us no yoke of subjection. This it does by virtue of the principle of private judgment, which puts conscience between us and the Bible, making conscience the supreme interpreter, whom it may be a duty to enlighten, but

whom it can never be a duty to disobey." [1]

This conception of the Charter of Christendom shows that nothing can be less adequate than a mere literary or critical treatment of Scripture. To enjoy the Bible as if it were only so much sublime literature is almost as gross a mistake as to argue from it as if it were a handbook of archaeology or a primer of science or an almanac of predictions. Scripture includes, indeed, marvellous eloquence and incomparable poetry. But the Lord is not in the eloquence, He is not in the poetry: He is in that still small voice which speaks quite as clearly through broken sentences and in homely phrases, but speaks always with demonstration of the spirit and with power. What we find in the Bible depends to no small degree on what we bring with us in our search. If we look for errors in history

[1] Essay on "The Education of the World" in *Essays and Reviews.*

or in science, we may find them there; if we look for noble specimens of ancient literature, we may find them there. But the spiritual value and import of Scripture are not in things like these. "In the Word," said Luther, "thou shouldest hear nothing else than thy God speaking to thee." It is this Divine Voice, articulate in the Bible, which gives it authority, and has established it as the supreme and abiding standard of the Church—by which Christians must school and test themselves alike in doctrine and devotion, in creed and conduct. This is why Scripture demands a response from which the conscience cannot be absolved. It claims that we humbly accept its eternal postulates as the basis of our thinking. It requires that we set ourselves, seriously and resolutely, to be schooled by its spiritual precepts and hopes and warnings. It bids us look at human history from the standpoint of the prophets, and to appraise modern

society by the moral standard of the apostles. It convinces us in regard to sin, and righteousness, and judgment to come, by confronting us with One who is Himself the Eternal Word of God.

IV The Bible and Civilization

"There is a river in the sea."

CIVILIZATION is the complex product of many unsuspected factors. We are living to-day on a wealth of moral and spiritual capital, accumulated through long generations, which has come down to us from the past. We inherit the great Christian tradition from the New Testament. We breathe the atmosphere of Christian faith. We take for granted its ideals of truth and duty and honour, though we hardly recognize where they originated. As iron passes into the blood, so the sacred essence of Scripture is running through the veins and tissues of modern life.

Here is a single illustration. Concerning the Parable of the Prodigal Son a modern English writer exclaims: "Is it not moving to think of all the millions of

men who for eighteen hundred years have read this parable, philosophers and peasants, in every climate, and now we are reading it to-day! Is it not moving —nay, awful—to think of all the good it has done, of the sweet stream of tenderness, broad and deep, which has flowed down from it through all history? History would all have been different if this parable had never been told." [1]

Consider, for another illustration, one immense public legacy which we have inherited, which we too often abuse or neglect. Consider that priceless institution which now seems part and parcel of the nature of things—the institution of Sunday. In some countries, indeed, and at certain periods, the weekly Christian festival has been marred and darkened by teachers who—in this, as in other matters—perverted the letter of the Old Testament to restrict the spirit of the New. Yet who can conceive of

[1] Mark Rutherford: *Catherine Furze*, chap. xii.

our modern world without the unspeakable blessing of Sunday? And assuredly there would be no Sunday if there had been no Bible.

We may realize some fraction of the debt we owe to the Scriptures, when we try to trace their influence in Europe through those centuries when ancient civilization dissolved and a new order slowly emerged amid the ruins of the old. There are many books in the world, but no other book or collection of books has produced effects comparable to the effects produced by the Bible. It is amazing that while the classic works of Greece and Rome are known and studied chiefly by scholars, writings which belonged to an obscure and despised race should have exerted through the ages such an extraordinary and formative influence over both individuals and nations.

Like other books, the Bible is on principle addressed to everyone. It is meant to be read, and during the first thousand

years of the Christian era no instance can be found of any prohibition or restriction of Bible reading on the part of the Church. The Fathers not only assume that the Scriptures are regularly read in public worship and in private devotion, but they constantly exhort all Christians, high and low, old and young, to mark, learn and inwardly digest what is written therein. According to Justin Martyr's description of Christian worship about 150 A.D. the service began with continuous reading of the Bible through many chapters, as far as time would allow. Afterwards, some official would preach. The office of reader was esteemed so highly that it was regarded as based on a special spiritual gift, and the reader in primitive days had a place among prophets and spirit-gifted teachers. Indeed, as von Dobschütz remarks, when we look at the most ancient manuscripts of Scripture which have come down to us—without punctuation, or accents,

or space between the words, or breaking off at the end of a sentence—we are tempted to think that superhuman assistance was needed for reading them aloud correctly. To do it well, the reader had to know his text almost by heart. From the *Shepherd of Hermas*—a second-century work by a Christian layman—we learn that Christians gathered often, perhaps daily, for the special purpose of common reading and learning. Another early Christian work[1] admonishes the faithful to use no other book at all except the Bible: "Stay at home and read in the Law and in the Book of Kings and in the Prophets and in the Gospel (which is) the fulness of these things. Keep far away from all the books of the heathen. . . . What then is wanting to thee in the Word of God, that thou throwest thyself upon these heathen myths?" The conclusive reason why every Christian should read the Bible

[1] *Didascalia*, chap. ii.

is stated thus—that just as everyone should speak to God as often as possible, so he should listen to God as often as possible. Again and again the Fathers put *oratio* (praying) and *lectio* (reading the Bible) side by side. Cyprian, for instance, writes to Donatus (*c.* 15): *Sit tibi vel oratio assidua vel lectio; nunc cum Deo loquere, nunc Deus tecum.*

The evidence on this point has been summarized by Professor Harnack in his volume on *Bible Reading in the Early Church.* No living scholar is more deeply versed in early Christian literature, and his conclusions may be stated in his own words: "Neither in the first three centuries nor in the fourth was the Bible in any sense subordinate to the Church. Accordingly we cannot discover the slightest trace of a belief that the relations of the laity to the Holy Scriptures were different from, and more limited than, those of the clergy; or of any authoritative episcopal ordinance

restricting laymen in their reading of the Bible. . . . Holy Scripture and the Church stood side by side as independent entities. The Bible belongs to the individual in the same sense as it belongs to the Church." Thus Harnack emphatically endorses the action of the Reformers, who simply reverted to the habit of the early Church when they placed the Bible in the hands of every Christian layman.

The Bible indeed pervaded the whole life of primitive Christians. We marvel to find how well they knew it, and how dearly they prized it. The place which it held among them may be measured by the fact that during the last great pagan persecution, at the beginning of the fourth century, an edict of Diocletian ordered all Bibles to be burned. We have thrilling accounts of how Christians tried to conceal their treasured rolls from the inquisition of Imperial officials. Faithful men suffered torture and death

for reading or possessing copies of the Scriptures. Those clergy who surrendered the sacred books of their churches were regarded as apostates.

After the era of toleration had dawned, the victory of Christianity under Constantine became a victory of the Bible as well. The first Christian Emperor ordered fifty splendid Bibles to be prepared at his own expense for the churches of his new capital, Constantinople. The Scriptures became more widely read than ever, and more constantly appealed to. We may cite a single illustration from the Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, the famous orator who was named "The Golden Mouth" because of his eloquence. In one of Chrysostom's sermons at Antioch,[1] this preacher holds an imaginary conversation with a carpenter about the price of the tools of his trade and the price of the books of the New Testament.

[1] Chrysostom: *Hom. iii. de Lazaro.*

He tells the carpenter that these books are nothing less than the tools of his spiritual trade, and urges that he ought to be ready to spend as much upon them as he spends on buying tools to earn his livelihood. We may infer that the cost of a manuscript Greek Testament at Antioch towards the close of the fourth century could not have been prohibitive for an artizan.

The place publicly given to the Scriptures appears in the custom that at Ecclesiastical Councils a Bible was placed upon the presidential chair, as a symbol of Christ Himself in the seat of honour. The Emperor Theodosius required a copy to be provided in every law-court, and witnesses who took an oath were sworn on a page of the Gospel. Under the Christian Emperors the Bible speedily began to influence legislation. Justinian, who codified the earlier Roman Law, shows in his *Novellæ*, or laws issued by himself, the new spirit of a

legislation based on Scripture ; sometimes he definitely refers to the Bible as his authority. So, on the other hand, the organization of the Church became moulded more and more to accord with Jewish precedents in the Old Testament, though the results were often far from happy. The Bible, at any rate, was acknowledged as something superhuman, bearing unearthly power and therefore ruling alike the Empire and the Church, affecting law and language, arts and letters, as well as the common conscience and the daily habits of men.

The Latin Bible.

The influence which the Bible exercised over Christian civilization in the West has been so pervading and so profound that we can only try to illustrate its action in one or two directions. Let us consider some of the historic effects of the Vulgate version. That famous

translation of the Scriptures into Latin was made about the end of the fourth century A.D. by Jerome, the friend of Augustine and the foremost scholar of his age. He utilized earlier Latin versions which were already current, but he translated directly from the original tongues. To quote the testimony given by our English translators of King James' Bible in 1611, Jerome performed his task " with that evidence of great learning, judgment, industry, and faithfulness that he hath for ever bound the Church unto him, in a debt of special remembrance and thankfulness."

In the New Testament the Vulgate is based upon good and ancient Greek manuscripts, to which Jerome had access. It may be said, indeed, that a Latin theologian with his Vulgate possessed a New Testament which came nearer to the original text than either the Greek *Textus Receptus* or the English Authorised

Version.[1] In the Old Testament, which he translated afresh from the Hebrew, Jerome produced a noble piece of work. "On the whole it is a finer translation than even our English Authorised Version; where the two agree, the latter is directly or indirectly derived from the former; where they differ, the Vulgate is usually found on the side of later and fuller scholarship."[1] Though the style of the Vulgate Bible varies, the swing of the Latin is often magnificent.[1] "Read in the Vulgate, the Apocalypse appears to be an original composition. And what a composition! If the Vulgate Psalms move us to tears, the Vulgate Apocalypse makes us tremble; every word seems to have been heated red-hot in the fire of persecution; we begin to understand Tertullian, and to live again in the time when only two questions were of any

[1] These verdicts are due to the Dean of Christ Church, who speaks on the subject of the Vulgate with unrivalled authority.

importance in the world—'Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?' 'Are you ready to die for Him?'"

By sheer merit Jerome's Latin Bible gradually superseded its forerunners, and became the accepted standard version in common use throughout Western Christendom. On this account it earned the name Vulgate—from the Latin adjective *vulgata*, which means popular or "adapted to the general reader." How popular Jerome's Bible must have been, before the invention of printing, is proved by the striking fact that as many as 8,000 manuscript copies survive to-day, more or less complete, preserved in various libraries and collections. Down through those dark and stormy centuries when modern nations were still in the making, the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew had practically died out. But nearly every man who could read at all, read Latin. And the Latin Vulgate remained the one Bible which was current

in most European countries for more than a thousand years.

The Cæsars passed away: but their Imperial tradition could not die. After centuries of conflict and confusion, Charles the Great was crowned at Rome as the theocratic head of a restored Western Empire. This truly great man allowed his mind to be governed by ideas and precedents drawn from the Scriptures. He felt himself ordained to be a new David, a new Josiah. He took special pains to secure a correct and trustworthy text of the Latin Bible which he esteemed as the supreme standard book for his people. In his legislation Charles embodied leading commandments from the Pentateuch—as for example, in his law for keeping Sunday, in his law for the payment of tithes, and in his law which prohibited taking interest for money. Indeed, it was Augustine's disastrous interpretation of our Lord's words in the parable, "Compel them to

come in," which led the Emperor to compel his conquered Saxon subjects to receive baptism. Historians agree that Charles the Great initiated a new order of things, which little by little subdued the chaos and tamed the savagery in Western Europe. That new order had the Bible as one of its broad foundations. Thus, for example, our own King Alfred inscribed the Ten Commandments at the head of his code of Saxon laws. And down through the middle ages it was to the Bible that people referred, not merely in their laws but in their commerce and their social life. They misquoted it and misused it indeed to sanction slavery and serfdom, and to justify their persecution of Jews and heretics. As von Dobschütz says, "Even if the thing had not been deduced from the Bible, they made it appear Biblical, though it was not so in itself, because they felt that it had to be Biblical if it was to be

recognized as an integral part of Christian civilization."

Far-reaching consequences followed from the fact that for so many centuries the Latin Vulgate was the sole form in which the Bible was known to western Christendom. No other book was copied so often and so splendidly by monastic scribes. Its manuscripts occupy a conspicuous place in the history of paleography, and its illuminations form one of the finest chapters in Christian art. It was pre-eminently the book of the middle ages. To an amazing extent it permeated men's minds and entered into their ideas and their speech. The popular conception of the universe was drawn from Scripture by the Church and taught to the people. For them the history of the world was made up mainly out of the Old and New Testaments, mingled with apocryphal legends. The walls and windows of every great church emblazoned the characters

and the scenes of Scripture, carved and painted by medieval artists. Medieval drama took the form of mystery plays which enacted scenes drawn from the same source. Medieval travellers commonly found their way to the Holy Land, on a pilgrimage or a crusade.

Consider what a wonderful part the Latin Bible has played in the Church's education. The saintly Christians who kept faith alive through the dark ages drew their knowledge of Scripture from no other version ; they all kindled their lamps from this flame. To understand medieval theology we must keep the Vulgate by our side. To understand Dante and Chaucer we must refer constantly to the same text-book. The monks and the mystics of the Latin Church fed their souls from its pages : they all thought and prayed and dreamed in terms of the Vulgate. Take one stray illustration of how it coloured their piety. We have read how saints like

Francis of Assisi used to show peculiar compassion for lepers and would even kneel and kiss their sores. But the key to this compassion lies in the Latin rendering of Isaiah liii. 4: "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted," where the Vulgate reads, *nos vidimus eum quasi leprosum.* Thus, every leper appeared like a stricken representative of Christ. So, again, it was the same Bible on which Thomas à Kempis meditated until he produced his *Imitatio Christi*—a book which has drawn such multitudes along the path marked out by the footprints of Jesus. The first Bible which Martin Luther ever read was a copy of the Vulgate, and from its pages God's free Gospel began to find a way into his soul. So that the Reformation itself can be truly said to have originated in the Latin Bible.

The Council of Trent in 1546 decreed that Jerome's Vulgate must be accepted

as authentic, and that no one should dare to reject it on any pretext. The first authoritative edition of the Latin Bible was published by Pope Sixtus V, in 1590; but it contained so many errors that it was promptly superseded by another issued two years later by Pope Clement VIII. This Clementine edition is still the official standard Bible of the Roman Church, which is carried by her missionaries all over the world and used by them in their teaching. Indeed, the Vulgate can claim to have had a wider circulation and to have been more widely read than any other version of Scripture—even than the original Hebrew and Greek texts.

Moreover we must not forget that the Latin of the Vulgate became a fountain from which flowed the modern Romance languages—Italian, and Spanish, and Portuguese, and especially French. So also it came to pass that all the earliest vernacular versions of Scripture

in Western Europe—except only the Gothic of Ulfilas—were made not from the Greek and Hebrew but from Jerome's Latin. Thus it was that John Wycliffe and his coadjutors translated from the Vulgate the first complete Bible in English. Thus it was that when a clearer day began to dawn in Bohemia, the earliest Czech Bible, which is associated with the name of John Huss, was made from the Vulgate. Derived from the same source, the earliest German Bible appeared in 1466—the first Bible to be printed in any modern language. The Vulgate also exerted no small influence over translators who worked from the original texts. Its renderings affected Luther's German Bible, and they may be traced also in our English Authorised Version. A translation made direct from the Vulgate for English Roman Catholics is commonly known as the Douay Bible, after the town of Douay in Flanders which was the home

of the seminary from which it issued. In a modernized form, this remains the Bible which their Church sanctions for use among English-speaking Roman Catholics.

The Influence of the Vulgate on the English Prayer Book.

The Bible which most Englishmen read to-day was mainly due to two men—William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale. To Tyndale, we owe the first printed editions of the New Testament and the Pentateuch. The first English Bible to be published with royal approval appeared in the reign of Henry VIII, when a copy was placed in every parish church. This was known as the Great Bible, and it had been prepared and edited by Coverdale. In the Great Bible much of the Old Testament, including the Psalter, represents substantially Coverdale's own translation, which was based not on the Hebrew but on the Latin

Vulgate. And this Psalter of Coverdale's —a version full of musical cadences— remains embedded in the English Book of Common Prayer, and is still chanted in thousands of Anglican churches.

The Latin titles to the Psalms which appear in the Prayer Book Psalter are simply the first word or words of each Psalm in the Vulgate. The same Psalter also includes some striking interpolations taken from the Vulgate, which do not occur in the Hebrew text or in the English Authorised Version. For example, in Psalm xiii. 6 we find the added words, "yea, I will praise the name of the Lord most highest"—words here inserted by the Vulgate from Psalm vii. 18. Again, in Psalm cxxxvi. the whole of verse 27 is added—being a repetition of verse 3. While in Psalm xiv., verses 5, 6, and 7 do not belong to the Psalm at all.

In the *Te Deum*, the closing verses are distinct from the original hymn; to

quote Dr. Frere, the Bishop of Truro, "they are suffrages in the form of versicle and response appended to it." These verses are mainly borrowed from the Vulgate Psalter, and we find traces of their origin in the *Te Deum* as printed in the Prayer Book. Thus "*Govern* them and lift them up for ever" reproduces the Vulgate *rege eos*. So the final verse, "O Lord, in thee have I trusted: let me never be confounded," is a rendering of the Vulgate Psalm xxx. (xxxi.) 1—*In te Domine speravi: non confundar in æternum*, where "confounded" reproduces *confundar*, which the Prayer Book Psalter renders "put to confusion."

In the Communion Service the "comfortable words" were translated, probably by Cranmer, direct from the Vulgate and occasionally betray their source. Thus "I will refresh you" stands for *ego reficiam vos* (Matt. xi. 28); and "So God loved the world"

reproduces *sic enim dilexit Deus* (John iii. 16).

In the Burial Service, the sentences read at the grave similarly betray their Vulgate origin. "Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live (*brevi vivens tempore*) and is full of misery (*repletur multis miseriis*) . . . and never continueth in one stay (*nunquam in eodem statu permanet*)."

That beautiful phrase which begins the evening collect, "Lighten our darkness," is a direct translation of the Vulgate *illumina tenebras meas* (Psalm xviii. 28); while our familiar expression "a vale of tears" comes from *vallis lachrymarum* (Psalm lxxxiv. 6). The influence of the Latin Psalter upon the great hymn-writers of the middle ages is a fascinating subject. We may venture to give one example. Everybody knows the English hymn, "Jerusalem the Golden," which Neale translated from Bernard of Clugny's noble Latin

rhyme in praise of the Heavenly Country. In Neale's lines " the shout of them that triumph, the song of them that feast," few singers observe the echo of *sonus epulantis* (Psalm xlii. 5) which was reproduced verbatim by Bernard.[1]

Instances and illustrations such as these might easily be multiplied ; but enough has been said to show that we still speak and think and pray and sing in terms of the Vulgate much oftener than we imagine.

Defects in the Vulgate, and their Consequences.

With all its merits the Vulgate had serious defects ; and so its influence was not an unmingled blessing. Jerome revised the Old Latin text of the Gospels with some care, but he did very little to the Epistles. Hence the Western Church was left with a version of St. Paul's

[1] This paragraph is due to Archbishop Bernard's *The Psalter in Latin and English.* (Introduction).

Epistles which corresponded imperfectly with the original; and this helped to bring about the result that for many centuries the Pauline theology was not sufficiently appreciated or assimilated by readers of the Vulgate.

Again—as the Dean of Christ Church points out—some of the great watchwords of Scripture found inadequate reproduction in Jerome's Latin. For instance *Lex* means much less than the Hebrew word for "Law," and *Justitia* means much less than the Hebrew word for "Righteousness"; *Testamentum* conveys only half the sense of διαθήκη, while *Verbum* is a quite inadequate rendering of λόγος.

In the same way, *gratia* does not properly represent χάρις, which connotes an atmosphere of kindness, producing a response of gratitude and love and confidence towards God. And hence the doctrine of grace in the Western Church became partial, external, hard, compared

with that doctrine in the Eastern Church : the sense of an atmosphere was replaced by the idea of a series of acts.

So μετάνοια means a change of mind, whereas *poenitentia* (by which the Vulgate translates it) suggests no more than sorrow for sin.

Again, πιστεύειν represents the heart's loyal confidence in a person ; whereas *credere* (its Vulgate rendering) means to believe intellectually that a statement is true. Hence in the Latin Church the whole conception of faith became more intellectual and less emotional, moral and spiritual.

Such religious effects have proved to be subtle and far-reaching. Not a few theological terms became current in England which were ultimately derived from the Vulgate, or through it from the Latin theological dialect which it consecrated and popularized. Even the English Puritans could not escape the

contagion of this Latin influence, which did much more to bias and infect their thinking than they themselves were aware.

Puritans and the Bible.

The Puritans themselves, however, must be regarded as in a special sense children of the English Bible. During those decades which elapsed between the death of Henry VIII and the death of James I, Englishmen became more and more the people of one Book. Gradually it penetrated their homes and inspired their worship, it coloured their imagination, it moulded their political ideas. In the end the Bible produced the Puritan revolution—a revolution whose spiritual consequences have never died out. The open Bible has been the strength of English religion. Down to this day no other book is enwoven so closely in the language and thought

and deepest faith of our people.

We might illustrate the influence of the Bible in public affairs by pointing to what Calvin achieved at Geneva and what Knox effected in Scotland. More memorable still were the results of the Puritan exodus. Three centuries ago a band of exiles set sail from England and voyaged westwards across the Atlantic. The passengers on board the *Mayflower* numbered barely a hundred persons, without a single man among them of wealth or rank or famous name. But they were companions in faith and tribulation. Persecuted and imprisoned and plundered at home because of their convictions, they had resolved to forsake their kinsfolk and country and to face the hazards of the stormy sea, that they might find refuge and liberty in what was then an unknown and barbarous land. It was an heroic venture. But, as Governor Bradford wrote in his *History of Plymouth Plantation*, " they knew they

were *Pilgrims*, and looked not much on those things, but lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits." The motive which inspired them was excellently summed up by their descendants who founded the Philadelphia Bible Society in 1808: "To preserve the authority of the Bible unimpaired, and to enjoy the privilege of a free conscience enlightened by its truth, our forefathers crossed the ocean with little more than this volume in their hands and its spirit in their hearts."

The exodus of the Pilgrim Fathers appears to-day as one of the momentous events in modern history. But the seed of its immense results lay in the fact that it was an exodus of faithful folk, who carried their faith with them. Tribes and races without number have migrated in the past, and subdued fresh spaces of the earth; but when they have founded a new state and fatherland,

they have taken with them their household gods. Look where we will in history we find that religion, wherever it works freely, is the power which creates and sustains nations. James Russell Lowell once declared that Calvinists founded commonwealths; and he pointed to Holland and Switzerland and America. Assuredly the fact that the Pilgrims took the Bible with them into New England as their most precious possession has had immeasurable consequences. Who can imagine the United States apart from the influence of the Bible?

Modern democracy, it is claimed by M. Borgeaud, takes its origin from the Compact signed by the Pilgrims in the cabin of the *Mayflower*, before they landed on the shores of Massachusetts. Bancroft, the American historian, even calls that Compact "the birth of popular constitutional liberty." At any rate, its signatories assumed that the whole

community is the source of authority. And they found in the Bible the ultimate charter of true democracy. For the Bible alone declares the unspeakable value of each individual man as the object of God's eternal affection. Human doctrines of equality and fraternity have no real basis, unless they be rooted in the truth that there is no respect of persons with God.

To-day we are confronted by a revolt against democracy itself. In every country poor men rebel against the social system which has produced them. Multitudes are fiercely repudiating those elemental beliefs and sanctions on which civilized life is built up. They proclaim their hatred of all authority, whether visible or invisible. They hold that happiness is a fixed thing, within easy reach of all, and that civilization is a mass of frauds by which happiness is appropriated by the few. And they have sworn, therefore, not to mend

the present order of society, but to destroy it by speedy and violent means.

Now there are some who excuse, or even justify, this temper among the disinherited. Others are ready to incur the incalculable risks of anarchy, because they see no other road to a regenerate state. Others, again, invoke force to defeat violence, and trust in machine guns as the safeguard against revolution. If we are serious Christians, however, we must needs search into the causes which breed these bitter anarchists. They are hungry for a material paradise ; and we can convert them only by setting a far more entrancing, and more commanding ideal before their eyes. The Bible is the book of man's immortal hope, the only book which makes pessimism a blasphemy and despair the unpardonable sin. And the Bible bears witness to the spiritual city which has descended out of heaven, and even now is slowly

taking shape and substance in our chaotic world. It is true that we cannot identify the city of God with any earthly state or kingdom or republic, or indeed with any single institution existing. For it transcends administrative machinery, whether ecclesiastical or political. Assuredly it dwells in the midst of that Great Church which is the blessed company of all faithful people. Nay, it appears wherever men deny themselves and forget themselves for the sake of goodness, or beauty, or truth. For it is like Thebes in the ancient legend, the city whose walls were "built to music, and therefore never built at all, and therefore built for ever."

By its very nature the city of God is spiritual. Christians understand that the problems of society are, in the last resort, problems of character, and in that sense spiritual problems. For character is a spiritual product. Nothing is spiritual except that which "spirit"

is and does, and spirit is that and that alone which thinks and feels and wills. Therefore materialism and animalism and secularity are most deadly foes of the city of God.

All social questions really hinge upon the answer to one great previous question—are we dealing with creatures who are a little lower than the angels, or with creatures who are a little higher than the beasts that perish? The New Testament takes for granted that man's spirit does not perish at death, but lives on in an eternal future. "The individual is immortal, and the State is not; that is the fundamental conviction which must always distinguish Christian politics from secular politics . . . It is the State which is transient while the individual is permanent, and the State must serve the individual."[1] In the light of immortality this present world appears

[1] See Bishop Temple's *Essays in Christian Politics.*

as a school and training ground for character. Christ has shown us that in His eyes the meanest personality is most sacred and dear. And therefore Christians must stand for personal liberty and for common fellowship and for the service of every human need.

Bolshevists denounce and repudiate the Bible. Yet how can we hope to create and sustain human fellowship, apart from that Book which is the Magna Charta of peace on earth and good will among men? The New Testament makes war upon all those evil passions which are the seeds of war. It destroys the moral microbes which can poison any society. It reveals God's everlasting personal love as the one remedy for men's greed of gain, for their furious competition, the only antidote to class hatred and bitterness and national pride. High above the rulers of the darkness of this world—above dictators and anarchists alike—Scripture opens

a vision of the Great White Throne. The future of Christian civilization, like its past, is bound up with the Bible.

" Oh, but the heavenly grammar did I hold
Of that high speech which angels' tongues turn gold !
. . . . . .
Or if that language yet with us abode
Which Adam in the garden talked with God !
But our untempered speech descends—poor heirs !
Grimy and rough-cast still from Babel's bricklayers."
FRANCIS THOMPSON.

OF all buildings which men ever erected, the Tower of Babel has cast the longest and the blackest shadow. To-day we are living on a polyglot planet, whose inhabitants are divided and set asunder by the bewildering confusion of tongues.

Few English people realize the extraordinary diversities of speech which separate the tribes and nations of mankind. Languages differ amazingly. Take Chinese, for example, which in one form or another is spoken by perhaps one-fifth of the human race. Chinese consists mainly, if not entirely, of words

of one syllable; it has no inflexions, no declensions, no conjugations, and little or no grammar. On the other hand, there are Bantu languages, spoken by uncivilized negroes in Africa, which possess complicated inflexions and a most elaborate system of sustained grammatical concord which pervades each sentence. In North America the Indian languages build up a complex idea by combining many syllables into a single word: thus in Cherokee, "*wi-ni-taw-ti-ge-gi-na-li-skaw-lung-ta-naw-ne-le-ti-se-sti*" is equivalent to "they will by this time have come to the end of their declarations of favour to you and me." The Polynesians possess only ten consonants—f, k, l, m, n, ng, p, s, t, v. The speech of the Hottentots is full of clicks and clucking sounds. An early French missionary who went out to Annam wrote: "When I arrived and heard the natives speak, particularly the women, I thought I heard the

twittering of birds, and I gave up all hope of ever learning it."

In Melanesia and the New Hebrides each little island speaks a different dialect, unintelligible to its neighbours, who have been enemies for uncounted generations: there are cases where three or four such dialects occur on one small island. In some regions of West Africa an explorer may find himself in the midst of a fresh language at the end of every two or three days' march. Strabo described the Caucasus as "the mountain of tongues," and many of its upland valleys still form a kind of linguistic museum; for by its situation this range caused a natural eddy in the migrations between Asia and Europe, so that remnants of many strange tongues have been there stranded and preserved. When the last Tsar of Russia kept his coronation festival at Moscow, he received in audience representatives of all the hundred and twenty races and tribes

included under his sway, each wearing a distinctive costume and using a separate speech. Among our fellow-subjects in the Indian Empire more than a hundred and fifty different languages are spoken —not mere dialects, but languages as different from each other, at least, as French is from Spanish or Italian.

It is true indeed that the old national order is changing before our eyes. Populations shift and mingle, and whole peoples die out. Not a few races seem to wither by mere contact with Europeans. In Canada and the United States the red men linger only in vanishing remnants. The Carib has practically disappeared from the West Indian islands. In the Pacific the Kanaka and the Papuan are dwindling. The last of the Tasmanians expired within living memory. The Australian aborigines are in rapid decay. We hear present-day prophets predicting that the earth will soon be divided among certain

dominant peoples, and that national dialects will be superseded by a few conquering languages. Men speak differently, because "their speech is a part of themselves, framed by their thoughts and feelings, and these are set in various patterns." Yet the patterns are being merged, and—so we are told—nations themselves are growing cosmopolitan and losing their old distinctiveness. It is argued that capital has become international, and that trades unionism is fast following along the same road. "On the horizon of modern thought we are in sight of the fact that in the progress of the world the days of 'nationalities' in the old sense are numbered." [1]

Yet such predictions can never be much more than guess-work. We are aware, on the other hand, in quite recent years of a significant and widespread revival of nationality. Closer

[1] See Benjamin Kidd: *Principles of Western Civilization*, p. 385.

contact between different countries, instead of creating sympathies, often discloses divergencies. Race-consciousness grows more intense, while race-hatreds certainly do not grow less bitter. Among Magyars and Czechs and Poles and Irish and Welsh, national spirit reasserts itself by a passionate pride in national speech. The notion of one patent universal language—Volapuk, or Esperanto, or Interlingua—remains no better than a dream. Whatever the future may have in store, we and our children are living in a polyglot world.

Even this brief survey of linguistic facts makes us understand that to the mass of mankind the Scriptures can come only in translated shape. If the Bible is to convey its message to any people, it must cease to be a stranger and foreigner, it must take out letters of naturalization in their midst, it must speak to them in their native language. A man apprehends slowly and painfully

what approaches him clothed in the garb of alien speech ; but he will be ready to welcome a message which appeals to him in the words which he learned from his mother's lips. The command to go into all the world and to preach the Gospel to every creature applies to the Bible as well as to the Church ; but to fulfil its apostolic mission God's Book must needs become all things to all men.

Translation of the Scriptures began in the morning of the Church's life and has moved along the central tide of Christian history. This work did not wait for the formal decree of any Council ; it proceeded from the deep, spontaneous Christian instinct that every man must learn the Gospel in his mother tongue. Early in the second century, from the Church at Antioch where the disciples were first called Christians, came the original impulse to turn the Scriptures into Syriac, which was then the common speech of the regions lying east of

Antioch towards the Euphrates valley. In Egypt, about the end of the third century—although the Church at Alexandria spoke Greek—the first Coptic version appeared for the use of native Egyptians. In the fourth century, from the Church at Constantinople proceeded the early Gothic version, for barbarian invaders of the Eastern Empire. From the Council of Ephesus a band of young Armenians carried back to their native land certain manuscripts, by whose aid the Armenian version was formed at the end of the fifth century, after Miesrob had for that purpose constituted the earliest Armenian alphabet. Similarly, in the ninth century, Cyril and Methodius invented what has since become the Russian alphabet and translated the Scriptures into Slavonic—the beginning of books and of letters for the great Slavonic race. The Frankish and Teutonic conquerors of the Western Empire accepted Latin as the common

tongue which every educated man could read and speak ; so Jerome's Latin Bible became for them not a sealed book, but literally their Vulgate, or common version, and remained the Bible of western Christendom for over a thousand years. When printing began in the middle of the fifteenth century, it was natural and fitting that the first complete book to issue from Gutenberg's press at Mainz should be the Latin Bible. More than a hundred editions of the Vulgate had been published before that century ended, and other versions speedily followed in the principal vernaculars of Europe. For instance, the Italian Bible was printed a dozen times before the year A.D. 1500, and eighteen folio editions of the Bible in High or Low German had already appeared when Luther published his New Testament.

But the story of Bible translation is far too long to summarize. Here we can only point to its astonishing achieve-

ments. Already some portion of Scripture has been translated and printed in over 760 different languages and dialects. That total, however, includes some ten obsolete languages represented by the printed text of early manuscript translations; and it also takes in about seventy existing dialects in which versions have been produced for merely philological reasons. After we make these deductions, the wonderful fact remains that at least one or more books of the Bible have now been published for religious use in 680 distinct forms of human speech.

Try to measure the full meaning of such figures. We may gain some idea of an author's influence from the number of languages into which his writings have been translated; because each fresh version opens the door to a new race of readers and correspondingly widens the constituency to which he can appeal. To-day the printed Gospel is speaking

to the world in ten times as many versions as can be claimed for any masterpiece of human literature,[1] and the disproportion goes on increasing. These manifold and multiplied versions of Scripture contribute a new chapter to the ever-growing volume of Christian evidences. The Bible has conquered and subdued the Babel of human speech; already it lies open, more or less completely, in languages which are current among above seven-tenths of mankind. Other religions, like Buddhism and Hinduism, possess sacred books of their own; but these Scriptures are not spread far and wide in the tongues of the world: none of them profess to be universal and oecumenical. Surely the fact that one Book is made readable for men of every

[1] One book does indeed pass this ratio. The various versions of the *Pilgrim's Progress* number more than ten per cent, though less than twenty per cent of the versions of the Gospel: but the *Pilgrim's Progress* will not disturb any inferences we may draw from the primacy of the Gospel among books which exercise a universal sway over the minds of men, primitive and civilized alike.

colour and in every country singles it out as the Book of the human race.

We note, moreover, that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Scriptures had been published in translations understood by only about two-tenths of mankind. Since then, the Scriptures have appeared in new versions which appeal for the first time to quite half the human family. Thus, in the history of the Bible during these last hundred years, two outstanding phenomena confront each other: the age of fierce and remorseless criticism has been also the age of unparalled translation and propagation.

The fact that Scripture cannot convey its message except in a multitude of different versions involves certain corollaries. It implies that the essential quality of the Bible—that which makes it different from other books—must be something which does not evaporate in

translation. We know what extravagant theories have sometimes been held as to the verbal inerrancy of the Scriptures. There was, for example, the claim put forth by certain Swiss reformers in the *Formula Consensus Helvetici* of 1675, which declared the vowel points and accents of the Hebrew text to be inspired by God. Orthodox Moslems maintain the absolute verbal infallibility of the Koran, and feel bound therefore to discourage any translation of their sacred book, which must be read in its original Arabic. It was on similar grounds that the rabbis of Palestine, who worshipped the letter of their Hebrew Testament, regarded the Septuagint translation as a national disaster ; they called the date on which it was begun " the fast of darkness," and compared it to the day on which Aaron had made the golden calf. Yet the Septuagint, whatever its defects, became the first great missionary version of Scripture, and proved one chief

instrument in preparing for the spread of the Christian Gospel.

This whole subject of Bible translation has a real bearing on the problem of inspiration. It suggests to us, as De Quincey has said, that "the great ideas of the Bible protect themselves. The heavenly truths of God's Word, by their own imperishableness, defeat the mortality of languages with which for a moment they are associated. The truth of revelation is endowed with a self-conservative and self-restorative virtue; it needs not to be protected verbally by successive miracles; it is self-protecting." The message of God in the Bible is not of a nature to be affected by verbal changes such as can be made by time or accident. "It is like lightning, which could not be mutilated, or truncated, or polluted." We remember, further, that God's revelation resides, not in any selected chapters or texts or phrases, but in the total content and purport of the

Bible, supplemented and corrected by itself.

From the history of the versions of Scripture another conclusion of grave practical import emerges. The world-wide experience of missionaries confirms the weighty dictum which Bishop Steere wrote from Zanzibar: "Our work must be all unsound without a vernacular Bible." Experience also proves that for the Christian Church in any country nothing is more vitally necessary to preserve its purity, nay, to secure its permanence, than the Scriptures in the language of the people. There are few more tragic chapters in ecclesiastical history than that which records how Islam was able to conquer North Africa, so that those Mediterranean coast-lands are now dominated by the Crescent which once paid homage to the Cross. How can we explain the mournful fact that the Church of Tertullian and Cyprian and Augustine vanished, and the whole broad

belt between Port Said and the Atlantic became, and has remained, almost entirely Moslem? It is doubtless true that before the Arab invasion, Christianity in North Africa had departed very far from the purity and simplicity of the New Testament. But Archbishop Benson suggested another secret cause of that Church's failure to stand fast against the Moslem flood: it had neglected to translate the Scriptures into the languages of its common people. The Latin Bible existed, indeed, but no early versions were made into those Punic and Numidian dialects which were the mother tongues of the North African races. On the other hand, there were ancient Coptic versions of Scripture; and so the Coptic Church survives in Egypt—a remnant, but still alive after so many centuries of Moslem persecution and oppression. And there was an ancient Ethiopic version; and so the Abyssinian Church still survives, degraded with superstitions, yet not

perished altogether. Looking further afield, we trace this same factor in the persistence of ancient Churches such as the Syrian, the Armenian, and the Georgian. We are tempted to believe that if the early Roman missionaries in China and Japan had popularized the Scriptures among the converts whom they baptized, their work might have proved less destructible. Perhaps there is no example of a nation, once Christian, ever abandoning the faith, so long as its people have possessed the New Testament in the vulgar tongue.

The Task of the Translator.

The problem of reducing a spoken language to written form has still to be faced, where some barbarous race possesses no literature of its own. To solve that problem is no easy task. Where native characters do not exist, the roman alphabet is commonly adopted, perhaps with some additional signs and

accents. But the connexion between sound and sense often proves extraordinarily complex and baffling. Even in English a single syllable, such as "box," can have several meanings: box may mean a trunk, or a blow, or an evergreen shrub, or part of a theatre, or the driver's seat on a carriage. But in Japanese the single sound *ki* has at least seventy-two possible meanings, each of which is expressed in writing by a different Japanese character. On the other hand, among the Shans in Burma the same written word may be intoned or pronounced in a dozen different ways, each conveying a distinct sense. Thus, for example, *ma ma ma ma ma* (if properly intoned) can mean "help the horse! a mad dog is coming." Similarly *pa pa pa pa pa pa* can mean "my aunt went towards the jungle, with fish slung on her shoulder"; and *kai kai kai kai kai* can mean "a fowl has just gone by, busily scratching mud."

Such illustrations have a serious

interest. For this system of "tones" is by no means confined to the Shan language. Elsewhere in Burma, and in Tibet, it prevails to a certain extent; and it is in full force over Siam and Cochin-China, and throughout all the eighteen provinces of China. The instances quoted indicate the difficulties which foreigners encounter in learning to speak and to write such strange tongues. For the slightest inaccuracy in the intonation of a word—pronouncing it a little too high or a little too low, too long or too short—will altogether change the meaning of a sentence. In Chinese, as spoken at Peking, there are only 420 possible syllables; yet they are made available for enunciating every thought which the Chinese mind can conceive, mainly by means of this wonderful system of tones. But the tones must be uttered correctly, or else the speaker will only enunciate nonsense. And not only must he speak correctly, he must hear correctly.

Unless his ear is trained and tuned to catch the niceties of pronunciation, he will be able to understand little of what is said to him.

It is hardly possible for us to measure what it costs to render the Scriptures for the first time into the tongue of some tribe which possesses no alphabet, no vocabulary, no grammar. After Henry Nott, the predecessor and companion of John Williams in the South Seas, had spent twenty years on the island of Tahiti in order that he might perfect himself in its language, he then proceeded to spend twenty years more in order that he might render the Bible into Tahitan. We do not sufficiently recognize the heroic drudgery of the noble army of translators, who toil on with untiring patience to give men of all races the Gospel in their native speech.

Many persons suppose that mere translating is not so very difficult a business after all. We recollect, perhaps, our

own youthful attempts at composition in Greek and Latin ; but those efforts lie so far behind us that we forget what pains were spent on them and what sort of results we produced. Exact and idiomatic translation is never easy. In the pages of *Punch* we used to find parodies of the grotesque fashion in which educated Hindus can misapply English phrases and idioms. But if Horace and Sophocles could come back and read the classical exercises which win prizes at a modern university, they might chuckle over our " babu " Latin and Greek.

In point of fact, this task of translating out of one language into another is choked with thorns and briars. The obstacles are enormous, the labour is almost inconceivable, the initial mistakes are not seldom astonishing and amusing also. Imagine the translator in New Guinea who wanted the proper idiom for " far be it from me to do this thing." He consulted an intelligent catechumen

and explained the idea to be conveyed. "Yes," replied the catechumen, "I understand exactly. We have the precise idiom: we say, 'May I speak to my mother-in-law before I will do this thing!'" For in that land of strange taboos one of the unpardonable sins is for a man to open his lips to his wife's mother. How can you find a name for "lamb" among the inhabitants of some island where the only quadrupeds are pigs and rats? How can you render "whiter than snow" in the languages of West Africa, where snow is utterly unknown? How can you translate "harp, sackbut, psaltry, dulcimer, and all kinds of music" in the vernacular of the Siberian Samoyedes, whose sole notion of music is the sorcerer's drum?

We have no space to dwell upon the immense and inherent difficulties of rendering the Scriptures into the poverty-stricken speech of a barbarous people. In the language of New Britain, for

instance, no verb could be found meaning to forgive. In Fiji, which is now a Christian country, the sixth petition of the Lord's prayer had to be rendered: "Be not angry with us on account of our sins, as we are not angry, etc." Pagan tribes often possess a full vocabulary for vices, with a limited vocabulary for virtues. In the Ibo language, current among three million negroes in Southern Nigeria, Archdeacon Dennis tells us that the same word has to do duty for "right" and "might," that "servant" and "slave" are synonymous, that "friendship" and "fornication" are scarcely distinguishable, that "conscience" has to be transliterated, and that there is no equivalent for "soul." Such examples might be multiplied to almost any extent. They remind us that after all the crucial difficulty in translating the Bible is ethical rather than linguistic. Sir George Grierson, who is the first living authority on Indian languages, has

described a hill tribe in Eastern India whose only idea of a feast was to get intoxicated on their native beer, and whose only word for festival meant literally "much beer-drinking." In rendering into their speech the parable of the Prodigal Son, he was put to great perplexity, because he could find no word to express "they began to be merry" which did not also suggest the idea of intoxication. The truth is that not only the heathen, but the speech of the heathen, must be converted. Their very language needs to be born anew. Their words and phrases must be redeemed from foul uses and baptized into a Christian sense in order to be able to convey the ideas of the Christian Gospel.

Illustrations such as these help us to appreciate the story told of Olivetan, who made the earliest French version of the Bible which was translated direct from the original Hebrew and Greek.

It is said that the name Olivetan means literally "burner of oil," and that it was bestowed on him as a *soubriquet*, by way of homage to the immense labour which he devoted to his version, trimming his lamp through so many midnight vigils. A true translator will spare neither oil, nor pains, nor patience, in order that the Scriptures may speak as clearly and simply and sweetly as possible God's message to each man in his own mother-tongue. Where can we seek a better ideal of a translator than in the picture which Interpreter showed to Christian: "It had eyes lifted up to heaven; the best of books in its hand; the law of truth was written upon its lips; the world was behind its back; it stood as if it pleaded with men; and a crown of glory did hang over its head."

From the nature of the case, every first attempt to render the Scriptures into a fresh language must needs be tentative and imperfect. No version emerges from

its translator's brain, as Athenè was fabled to have sprung, full-panoplied, from the head of Zeus. The Bible learns to utter God's message in a new tongue as a child learns to talk. First in broken words, which gradually gain shape and distinctness; then in sentences, which though disjointed at first grow more and more closely connected, till ultimately the child's words become a more or less complete vehicle of his ideas. Behind the finished Book lie its earliest sections —the New Testament, or the Psalter, or one or two Gospels; behind these, again, lie the first attempts at the Lord's Prayer and a few scattered texts. Arduous preliminary labour is necessary. More than three hundred languages have been reduced to written form and provided for the first time with an alphabet and a grammar, simply and solely in order that they might become vehicles for conveying the message of the Bible.

The work of Bible translation obviously possesses high philological interest and scientific value. It has crystallized these hundreds of unwritten languages, which hitherto had only a spoken existence. It has taken many a corrupt and degraded dialect and purified its forms and phrases, so that the poor miserable jargon becomes clothed and in its right mind—transformed, like the demoniac of old, into a messenger of redeeming love. The Rev. A. W. Banfield, who translated the New Testament into Nupé for two million negroes on the Upper Niger, relates how these Nupé themselves often told him: "We never thought that you could say such pure things in our language." Yet even the lowest, most sordid forms of speech may be transfigured as they learn gradually to express Christian ideas. Though they have lain among the pots, they become as the wings of a dove covered with silver and her feathers with yellow gold.

Historians recognize the immense and enduring influence which has been exercised by great classic translations of Scripture—by the English Authorized Version upon the language of England, and by Luther's Bible upon the language of Germany. But for hundreds of tribes and races the New Testament has been the first printed book they ever saw in their own speech, the primer from which they learned to read, the beginning for them of letters and literature and wisdom.

Any great book must inevitably suffer when it is made to speak in what is not its native language. Even the best translation can hardly be better than the copy of a picture or the cast of a statue. When we take some master-work of human genius—the *Iliad* or the *Divina Commedia*, or *Paradise Lost*, or *Faust*, or *Macbeth*—and compare it with its finest version in a foreign tongue, we begin to realize how much has been lost. The

translation of an original poem is apt to resemble the wrong side of a piece of tapestry—the sharp outlines vanish, the clear bright colours are blurred. Because a poet's thought and language must needs be so fused together that it is half fatal to divorce his ideas from his diction. Indeed, the most perfect pieces of literature are the least capable of adequate translation.

The Bible, however, comes to us, not as perfect literature, but as essentially the medium and vehicle of God's revelation. It is not without significance that the apostles and evangelists wrote in Greek, which came nearest to a universal language in the ancient world. Moreover they did not write in classical Greek. As Erasmus pointed out,[1] " they learned Greek not from the orations of Demosthenes but from men's common talk." Of recent discoveries about the Bible none is more striking than the testimony

[1] In his *Comment on Acts*, x, 36.

as to the language of the New Testament which has been unearthed during the last few years out of rubbish heaps of papyrus fragments and broken pottery, buried in the sands of Egypt and dating back before the beginning of the Christian era. What the new linguistic evidence demonstrates may be stated in the words of a distinguished scholar: "The conclusion is that 'Biblical' Greek was simply the vernacular of daily life." The New Testament was composed in the common homely speech of those who first read its pages: it was written quite literally in the vulgar tongue.

The Bible possesses the unique quality that it may be rendered into any language without sensibly losing its majesty and tenderness and spiritual strength. The Scriptures as a whole can be translated with but little sacrifice of their energy and their beauty. Into whatever barbarous tongue you render the New Testament, it seems to fit that tongue as

though it had been made for it : it *was* made for it ! In every version it retains its power to pierce the thoughts of the heart ; it still remains sharper than a two-edged sword ; it still divides joint and marrow. It does its supreme work —compared with which nothing else matters.

Scripture is, indeed, so quick and powerful, stored with such radiant energy, that its heat and light can be conveyed through very imperfect media. Experience proves in a wonderful way how even crude and tentative versions can accomplish spiritual results which bear witness to a power which is not of this world. With all their defects, each of them becomes a means of grace. " It tells me my heart," confessed a negro in the West Indies. " It makes men new," cried a Bechuana in South Africa. Assuredly the power of Pentecost has not died out. The message of Everlasting Mercy is able to subdue to

its service the confusion of human tongues. Just before the Great War began, a Greek Christian sent a letter to London from Chalcis, a town with classic memories. He wrote in very broken English, and ended with this epigrammatic sentence whose quaintness may be forgiven for the sake of the profound truth which it struggles to express: "The gabs are many, but the ghost is one." A Father of the early Church left us the same testimony otherwise expressed: "The dialects of the world are unlike one another, but the power of the tradition is one and the same." [1]

Surely the spiritual potency of its versions in all languages and among all races sets the New Testament immeasurably above every other book. What is there to substitute for it? A dramatic preacher once pictured a missionary landing on some savage island in the

[1] Αι κατὰ τὸν κόσμον διάλεκτοι ἀνόμοιαι, ἀλλ' ἡ δύναμις τῆς παραδόσεως μία καὶ ἡ αὐτή.—Irenæus: *Contra Haeres. I. X.* 2.

Pacific, and addressing the cannibals who gathered round him in words like these: "Wipe your blood-stained lips, and listen while I read you this passage, which I have translated into your own tongue, from *The Light of Asia*." The evidence for the supremacy of the Bible lies in the moral and spiritual power with which it is speaking to-day in all the dialects of the world. God's living voice uttered through the Scriptures still comes home to men's consciences, and authenticates itself in their deepest experiences. On the title page of an Italian pocket Testament printed at Lyons in 1551 we read: *Il Nuovo ed Eterno Testamento di Giesu Christo*—The New and Eternal Testament of Jesus Christ. This Book can never be called old, except in the sense in which time is old, while morning is always new. Its message is as mighty as ever to quicken and regenerate human characters; it moves among the nations with the power of an endless life.

"Mankind may have a thousand tongues, but it has only one heart, and that heart understands one language the whole world over—the language of Divine Love."

VI *The Vitality of the Scriptures*

"Men's Works have an age like themselves; and though they out-live their Authors, yet they have a stint and period for their duration: This only is a work, too hard for the teeth of time, and cannot perish but in the general Flame, when all things shall confess their Ashes."
SIR THOMAS BROWNE: *Religio Medici.*

LITERATURE divides itself into two main classes—books which are permanent, and books which are fugitive. And so a searching criterion which we apply to the Bible may be described as the test of vitality. Compared with most other books we can say that it survives and is active, while they die and are forgotten. We are taking the crudest of all tests which can be applied to a book when we count up how many readers it has found. The circulation of literature on a vast scale is of comparatively recent growth. When the history of publishing in England comes to be written, it may record that the first modern book which

sold half a million copies was Queen Victoria's *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands*—a book that appealed to almost everybody, and came out at a low price. Now that novels as well as works of standard literature appear in cheap editions, they are purchased in immense numbers. It has been estimated that more than twenty-five million volumes of the works of Charles Dickens have been issued from the press. In France, Zola counted his readers by many millions. In the United States huge circulations are claimed for authors whose names are little known this side the Atlantic. To-day, there seems hardly any limit to the vogue of a new work which appeals to the general taste and fascinates popular imagination.

Yet one outstanding fact is seldom realized. Year after year, the book which sells best is invariably the Bible. We will leave out of count those millions

of separate Gospels and Psalters which missionaries are circulating annually in hundreds of different versions. We will deduct editions of the Scriptures printed by zealous people for giving away. There remain at least three million Bibles and New Testaments which are being issued and bought and paid for, every year, in various parts of the world.

Nothing need be added to emphasize the eloquence of such figures. It is a simple fact that one venerable book is always in constant demand. Though it is generally printed in a forbidding style and issued in unattractive shape, it far outsells every other book that is published. An eminent bookseller in New York summed up the case when he said: "You may talk as you will about your multitudinous editions of popular novels, but the Bible leads them all, year in and year out." Judged by the test of circulation this Book stands high above every other book.

Of the new books issued in England we may safely say that not one in five ever reaches a second edition. There is no reason to suppose that new publications are any less ephemeral in France and Germany and America. The average life of a modern book is only about four to five years: after that, the booksellers tell you "it is dead"—and it has no resurrection.

Whereas the Bible to-day, at the end of so many centuries, is as vitally alive as ever. It is being printed in vaster numbers, it is circulated more widely over the world; it is studied more profoundly, and cherished more passionately; it is exerting a mightier spiritual influence than at any previous period in its history.

> The seasons change, the winds they shift and veer:
> The green of yesteryear
> Is dead: the birds depart, the groves decay:
> Empires dissolve and peoples disappear . . .

" Other books pass away ; but of this the silver cord shall never be loosed, nor the golden bowl broken, nor the mourners that go about the streets proclaim that at last the great Book is dead and carried to the charnel-house of dead religions."

No other book exerts the same living influence as the Bible. Such vitality is the more wonderful when we remember that the Bible has been passing through a century of the sternest and most searching criticism which any book ever had to face since time began. As a result of this, the Scriptures have gained far more from criticism than they can ever lose. In the words of Earl Balfour, " these critical researches make the Bible far more a living record of the revelation of God to mankind than it ever was in the pre-critical days." Indeed, most of the questions over which scholars dispute and contend have little bearing upon the spiritual content of Scripture. When criticism has

exhausted itself, the Bible remains intact in everything which makes it to be the Bible. Its liquid texture can receive no mortal wound. We meet God in these pages as we meet Him nowhere else. His revelations in nature, in history, in science, do but confirm and illustrate the one supreme manifestation of Himself. "There are some now living who after passing through all the religious perplexities of their age, after doubting whatever can be doubted . . . yet believe in the Bible more than ever. They brood on it much more, they learn from it much more than they did when they were afraid to suffer their minds to play upon its contents."

Surely it is one impressive proof of the vitality of the Scriptures that they are continually evincing their quickening power, sowing a Divine seed which springs up and bears fruit we know not how. The ultimate evidence of all life must lie in its inherent vital force;

and so behind the historic authentication with which the Scriptures come to us lies this living seal with which they are sealed.

This great fact is attested by the history of the Church and the biographies of the saints, and confirmed by present day experience both at home and in the mission field. Year after year new examples prove the spiritual vitality of Scripture as it is dispersed in all lands and takes root and fructifies among all races. To quote words of Bishop Gore, "We can scarcely imagine how much even a simple Gospel can do to bring home the attraction of Christ to minds in all parts of the world; and if we read the records of Bible diffusion we shall find the most touching and penetrating stories of this power of the Bible, simply by its own force, to penetrate the conscience and bring light to the heart." After all has been said which needs to be said by way of qualification and

abatement, we dare not forget the ultimate truth—that the seed is the Word of God, and not the comments and interpretations of men. The spiritual germ, which can quicken and nourish and transform humanity, resides in that Gospel of redeeming love which is itself the essential message and content of Scripture.

The Scriptures belong not to one country but to all nations. No other sacred books cover so vast a range of diversified history. They begin for a chosen family, but they end for the world. They deal with mankind from its cradle to its grave, and assert their dominion over the human race. "Never man spake as this Man"—that was the verdict of the generation which listened to Jesus Christ. "Never book spake as this Book"—that has been the verdict of the generations which have heard its message: that is still the verdict of those who read it to-day.

There resides in the Bible a spiritual energy which no criticism has been able either to explain or to destroy. The late Master of Balliol was one of the most sagacious of modern scholars, with a deep knowledge of human nature; and his verdict on this question is worth recalling: "Utilitarianism and German theology have both of them, in different ways, a zeal for criticism and for truth which is very commendable. But neither of them has ever been found a substitute for that which they are displacing. They have never got hold of the heart of the world."[1] That last sentence points to the very centre of the problem. It is the miracle and mystery of the Bible that it has got hold of the heart of the world.

We may say of Scripture that in the deepest sense it has no respect of persons. The Bible makes a universal appeal to all sorts and conditions of men.

[1] *Life of Benjamin Jowett.* I, 369.

> " It takes the suffering human race,
> It reads each wound, each weakness clear :
> And strikes its finger on the place,
> And says : *Thou ailest here, and here !* "

Other books lay hold of particular sections and classes of mankind : they are meant for men of science, or for artists, or for literary people. This contains a great catholic message which declares at the very outset that " there is no difference." In Ceylon a humble fruit-gatherer read the first page of the Sermon on the Mount, and was well pleased. " These are very good teachings indeed," said he, " but as we belong to the lower castes, these teachings are not for us." He was told that the Everlasting Father is no respecter of persons, and that in His sight there is no caste at all.

Scripture is catholic, partly because it is not all cast in one and the same mould. Certain sections of the Bible appeal with unexpected force to different races, and

to men in various stages of civilization, who read its pages with other eyes than ours. We may illustrate this point by a few actual examples. When Dr. Kilgour was translating the Old Testament into Nepali, the language of the gallant little Gurkhas, he found it an arduous and tedious task to render the long chapters of ritual regulations in Leviticus; but he was astonished to discover that his Nepalese assistant, who was not a Christian, considered those chapters to be among the most interesting and important in the whole Pentateuch. So, again, the Chinese, who cherish a profound reverence for ancestors, are immensely impressed by the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, because it begins with the genealogy of our Lord, which, as one of them wrote, "goes back to our Chinese Hsia dynasty." In China, Genesis is also a favourite, because this is "the book which tells of the beginning of things." In pagan countries

it is by no means uncommon for missionaries who are translating the Old Testament to make a version first of the Psalter and then perhaps of Genesis, and then to translate the Book of Jonah before attempting any other of the prophets; because they realize that Jonah is the one thoroughly missionary book in the Old Testament, and that its message comes home to their converts with peculiar power.

We constantly forget that the Scriptures were not composed, primarily, for Englishmen, and that no part of the Scriptures was written by a European. This fact involves far-reaching consequences. For example, it is sometimes stated that young Indian students find great difficulty in understanding the language of the English Bible. The following pronouncement, however, appeared in the columns of *The Indian Social Reformer*, an able and influential newspaper edited and published by non-

Christians at Bombay: "The Bible is perhaps the one English book which the Indian boy feels the least difficulty in following, as the forms and ideas are those with which an Oriental is most familiar." Now it would be quite impossible for European boys to follow the ideas of the *Vedas* or the *Tripitaka*, however admirably translated. There is only one Book which can rise above the barriers of time and colour and race, and make its appeal to East and West alike: because this Book alone declares that God has made of one blood, and has loved with one love, all sorts and conditions of men.

This Book does not belong to scholars any more than it belongs to priests; it can come home to the minds of children who read the Gospel pages. It is able to unveil its inmost secret, not to the elaborately instructed, but to the simple-hearted soul. When learned persons warn us that no book in the world so

much requires expert interpretation as the Bible, we answer that no man is isolated from the ever-present Inspirer, Who becomes His own Interpreter when we consult Him as we read. Nay, one chief use of this Book is to make us feel how near He is to every one of us. God's living voice speaking in the Bible still comes home to men's consciences and penetrates into their deepest experience. God's redeeming love still chooses this channel whereby to reach and subdue the human heart. "A chance text of Scripture falls upon the ear, in church or out of it, and a touch of power comes with it, and with the power a flash of light, and a saint is made." Roman apologists have argued that the crucifix, which is considered indispensible to every Catholic, is in itself an ever-open Bible. But it is the ever-open Bible which can fulfil those spiritual functions which are suggested by a crucifix. Here, in the pages of the Gospel, as nowhere

else, we may indeed survey the wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died.

The "Treacle Bible."

The first English printed Bible, published in 1535, is sometimes known as the "Treacle Bible"—on account of the sentence in Jeremiah viii. 22, *Is there no balm in Gilead?* which Coverdale rendered thus: *There is no more Triacle in Galaad.* Now the derivation of our word treacle goes as far back as the Greek *Thêrion,* a venomous creature, the adjective from which, *thêriakos,* meant anything appertaining to venomous creatures. Thus in pharmacy *thêriaka* or "triacle" came to denote the antidote for snake-bite; and on the principle that "like cures like," it was believed that the *thêriaka* must contain something of the *thêrion.* So Jeremy Taylor observes: "We kill the viper, and make treacle of him." In Coverdale's time this word "triacle" had come to mean

any balsam or sovereign remedy. Indeed, "Venice treacle," compounded of something viperine with other ingredients, lingered on in the British Pharmacopœia as late as the eighteenth century; and our familiar sweet syrup received the name treacle because in appearance it resembled that once famous balsam. Thus the quaint epithet "Treacle Bible," at any rate, suggests the healing potency of Scripture, which contains God's sovereign antidote for the evil that is in the world.

All medicine is more or less mysterious in its working. The wisest doctor cannot fully explain how his remedies bring about their results. Half of his science is empirical and inductive; but he knows by long experience that certain applications will produce certain effects. And the proof of the healing power of the Gospel lies in the results which Christ has wrought in corrupt and degenerate souls. It is not merely that the moral

atmosphere which we breathe to-day is purer than the atmosphere of the old pagan world in the days of Socrates or of Cicero. The credentials of a healer consist of personal cures effected in particular cases. And Christ justifies His claim to be the Physician of souls because He does actually heal and rectify human character. Those men and women in Christendom whom we call pre-eminently good confess humbly that they owe everything to Him and His quickening grace. The beauty of their holiness is just the glow of moral health which Christ has imparted and which Christ sustains.

In the ancient parish church of Sefton, in Lancashire, there is a curiously carved shield, emblazoned with emblems of the Passion. Each upper quartering shows a pierced Hand, each lower quartering a pierced Foot; while the centre is charged with a pierced Heart. The motto beneath reads, *Vulnera Die*

medicina mea—"God's wounds are my healing." That strange medieval heraldry is a parable which embodies the catholic experience of the Church. Men may express it in various terms and explain it by different formulæ, but there is only one Divine remedy for human guilt and corruption; and the proof of that remedy is found in the spiritual virtue which it practically exerts on those who receive it. As General Gordon wrote: "The chief proof, after all, that the Bible is good food is the eating of it; the healing efficacy of the medicine, when it is used, is a demonstration that it is good."

It may be instructive to cite a few quite recent examples of the power of Scripture to bring healing and blessing to the soul. In hospital at Port Said, a German engineer begged for a Bible; day after day he pored over its pages, until at last he whispered: "It is strange that I have had to come to Port

Said to know Christ as my personal Saviour." "Welcome!" cried an old Frenchwoman in the valley of the Loire, "Welcome! If you only knew the good I have gained from my Book! How happy I am to-day! Without this Book I would never have known joy and peace. I have come to understand now that God will not have a divided heart: He must have everything or nothing."

At Manila, a young Filipino scholar who had assisted in translating the Scriptures into Tagalog, gave this testimony: "I became a Christian through reading the Bible. When I saw in St. John iv. 24, that 'God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth,' I began to think that worshipping God through idols must be wrong, and from this I was gradually led on to the truth. At first my father and brothers were very bitter against me; I said little to them, but gave each of them a Bible and asked them to read

it for themselves; in time they too became convinced, and they are now Christians."

In Spain the proprietor of a boot-shop at Pegalaja, in the province of Jaén, said: "I bought a book entitled *Nuevo Testamento*. I got used to reading it; it has made a revolution in this house, and in the homes of my friends. In this book I find clearly that Jesus Christ is the only One who can save, and that He hears us at whatever place we pray to Him; that He is love; that salvation is free; and that we cannot be saved through our good works . . . I have faith in religion, but I am not a fanatic; I am only satisfied with what I myself can touch and understand. For this reason I have meditated on what I have read in the book, and I have grasped at least those things essential for the salvation of the soul."

In China, a missionary was staying at Chingchow, in the Province of Hunan, when a Chinaman came into the city to

see him one Sunday morning. The man said that he knew it was Sunday; he had been keeping Sunday for some time. A year and a half before, the missionary had sold him a Chinese New Testament, and that Testament had led him to God. He had read it already seven or eight times. "Did he understand it?" "No, not all; there were some hard passages, especially in the Revelation." But he had broken off his opium simply through faith in Jesus Christ and prayer, and he had just helped a friend of his to do the same. He was a disciple of the New Testament.

A humble peasant-woman in France found peace through reading the New Testament. "I do not put my trust in men," she said, "or even in religion. I go to the Gospel, where God Himself speaks to me. I am poor, but I would not exchange my lot with that of a millionaire, for I have a treasure which cannot be stolen away. I rest on my

God and Saviour, and that is enough for me."

Let us take one final example from the mission field, which is the working laboratory of the Church. The New Hebrides form a group of volcanic islands lying about a thousand miles north of New Zealand. The natives are a mixed race, partly Malay and partly Papuan, whose numbers are estimated at 70,000. Fifty or sixty years ago these people were cannibals of a degraded type—perhaps the least civilized of any islanders in the Pacific. They have been evangelized by the Presbyterian Church; and Dr. Macdonald, who spent the main part of a long missionary life on the island of Efate, gave the following impressive testimony as to the power of the Scriptures among them :

"The New Testament in Efate was printed in 1889, and that year we put it into the hands of the people. In every village we have a mission school, and

the principal work in those schools is to teach the people to read the Scriptures and to understand them and to live by them. To-day, the New Testament is their code of laws; they have no other, and they strive continually to frame every part of their life according to its precepts. Each Christian village has made it a rule that the people themselves should elect one of their number to be their chief, and a few of the leading men to be his assistants; but, though the chief is the greatest man in the village, he can exercise no arbitrary power. One day the people of a certain village came to me and said: 'This man, whom we elected chief, is not acting as we thought he would. His conduct towards us is not according to the Word of Jesus that we find in this Book.' I inquired into the matter, and I found that the people were not wrong, so I had to agree with them.

"Then there is in each village a

Christian teacher, who is also an important man. But both his conduct and his teaching must conform to the New Testament. In the mission field this is the standard, not only in the family, but in the community and in the Church. The missionary, while he is the servant of all, is in some respects the most influential man in the island ; but though at first he may be in their estimation, and against his will, a kind of Pope and Cæsar in one person, he soon finds to his great relief that his is a limited monarchy indeed. Much as they like and respect and trust the missionary, he is strictly limited in that all his conduct and teaching must conform to the New Testament. If he were to depart from it, he would immediately lose his influence. These people are very much like children ; they are very keen judges of character, and the missionary has influence only so far as they see in his life among them the life of Christ.

It is not by means of arguments against their superstitions, or by denunciations of their evil practices, that the Gospel prevails among these people. It is by the simple teaching of God's redeeming love to us through Christ, as set forth in the New Testament."

. . . . .

In the famous Tribuna of the Uffizi gallery at Florence, a tourist armed with his guide-book went up to the curator: "Are these your masterpieces?" he asked; "I certainly don't see much in them myself." "Sir," said the curator, "these pictures are not on their trial: it is the visitors who are on their trial." Those who see little in the Bible should realize that after so many generations of Christian experience the Bible is not for the first time on its trial now.

SPIRITUAL truth finds its ultimate authentication in the depths of spiritual experience. The challenge of Divine wisdom is not "O argue and reason," but "O taste and see." So the incontestable witness and warrant for God's living water must come from those men who have themselves tasted its virtue to refresh and satisfy the soul. And the final evidence for the Bible can be seen in that moral power which it exerts over the characters of faithful Christians. They are the highest of all critics, the real experts in Scripture; and their verdict is enshrined in the hearts of Christ's little ones and written at length in the lives of His saints.

Not a few scholars try to deal with the New Testament simply as a record of primitive origins; they study in its

pages the earliest documents which we possess in regard to the sources of Christian faith. Now that is true, indeed, and necessary ; yet it falls short of the whole truth. This volume refuses to be treated merely as the venerable monument of the Church's beginning. It lives and moves in our midst to-day, instinct with unearthly forces and virtues. The most startling achievement of recent science has been to discover what enormous energy is contained in a single atom of radium. And this is a parable of the spiritual energy which resides in the Gospel record : like no other book it pulsates with the powers of the world to come.

The New Testament possesses a strange power to reach the conscience and heart of any reader who will seriously ponder its message, and we have the overwhelming testimony of experience to prove how mightily that message can speak. President Woodrow Wilson

said: "Give men the Bible unadulterated, unexplained, pure, unaltered, uncheapened, and then see it work its wholesome work through the whole nature. It is very difficult indeed for a man or for a boy who knows the Scripture, ever to get away from it. It haunts him like an old song. It follows him like the memory of his mother. It remains with him like the word of a revered teacher. It forms a part of the warp and woof of his life." What pen can do justice to the romance of the Scriptures, enshrined in humble dwellings? The poor of this world have treasured the Book "which is compensation for all things, and which is never more at home than on bare dressers and worm-eaten looms." Montaigne relates how his father bequeathed to him his cloak—a garment of thick, durable cloth—and he loved to wrap himself up in this cloak as he sat in his study: "I felt," he says, "as if I were surrounded

by my father." Millions of Christians have felt when reading the New Testament as if they were surrounded by Jesus Christ.

We have seen how the Bible possesses this rare catholic quality, whereby it comes home to men of all races in their own mother tongue. Yet we realize also that the Bible must appeal pre-eminently to Christians. For it belongs to them, as it belongs to no other people, and they learn to read it from within. There is only one Book for the universal Church. There is one charter for the whole congregation of Christ's flock. There is one norm and standard of faith for all the children of God who are scattered abroad. The liturgical use of Scripture remains, what it has always been, a dominant and indispensable feature in Christian worship. The Holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge this supreme treasury of devotion. From the very first, Christians

have all been reading and teaching and singing and praying out of the Bible.

We freely admit that Scripture is not the sole and all-sufficient gift which Christ has bequeathed to men. He perpetuates Himself on earth by His Spirit and in His Church. Indeed, we misconceive of the Bible unless we think of it in the hands of the fellowship of the faithful. But from generation to generation the one people of God have found it the meat and drink of their souls. And the witness of Scripture to Christ is verified and attested by the society of the redeemed and the forgiven, in whom and upon whom Christ has wrought His works of power. In this practical sense the Church becomes a witness of Holy Writ, the Church does confer authority on the Bible. Not that Scripture derives its authority from the mere fact that ecclesiastical synods and councils have pronounced it to be true. As Luther said, "The Church cannot give more

force or authority to a book than it has in itself. A council cannot make that to be Scripture which in its own nature is not Scripture." The Church confers authority upon the Bible, in so far as the life and experience of the saints ratify its mighty affirmations. And it is very wonderful to find how, in every age and every land, the most Christlike Christians meet and are at home with one another in the pages of the New Testament. There "their speech is one, their witnesses agree." There they discover the grammar and vocabulary of the inward life, they learn to use a common language concerning the incommunicable secrets of the heart.

Moreover, to study the Scripture as it has been translated into Christian experience, makes us realize the oneness of Christ's life throughout His far-spread family. These self-same verses in all generations have made glad the city of God. In this common meeting-place of

believers we discover the fellowship of faith indeed. The New Testament carries with it to-day a halo of mystic vindications which it could not possess in the beginning. "It comes to us not only as a message from God, but tremulous with the countless Amens it has awakened in the heroic souls it has fashioned and inspired. The promises upon which God's servants in every age have hoped, receive back into themselves sublime reactions from the spiritual forces they have kindled within the elect, and come to us vocal with new significance. The experiences of the devout and the believing in all ages are gathered back into the Divine message by which such souls were helped and sanctified, and through this living voice within us we realize the doctrine of the communion of saints. It is in this high spiritual sense that the Church is the interpreter and the guardian of God's Word."

Let us assume, for a moment, that the Bible indeed contains what it claims to contain—the Word of the living God, the utterance of His will, the manifestation of His purity and His pity, the disclosure of His self-sacrifice, the declaration of His unspeakable love for mankind. Assuredly this Divine revelation has not been sent into the world merely to increase the sum of human knowledge. We cannot measure it apart from its action—its generative force and virtue exerted upon men's lives, its quickening of men's characters, its power to purify and ennoble them and lift them higher and higher towards the All-perfect.

Now among the many varied types of human character on earth there is one type which we agree to call specifically Christian, because, in spite of all failings and limitations, it puts us in mind of Jesus Christ. Although we cannot analyze the charm and distinction of that character, we recognize it as

substantially the same in the past as in the present. It keeps its likeness amid the most unlike conditions, and we know it wherever we meet it, in peasants or courtiers or scholars, "in the manliest of men and in the most womanly of women." Everywhere it reproduces the same features: it is so humble and tender-hearted, so sincere, and self-forgetful, so brave and unworldly, that we feel certain it must draw its life from sources not of this world. It is a character which seems dying to selfishness and more and more alive to God, more sensitive to His voice, more radiant with His beauty.

"This is the character of holiness, the character of the saints—and the book whose influence has quickened and directed and chastened and upheld it is the Bible. . . . It is an impressive sight which rises before us as we look back and see the great line of saints, and mark how all along the Bible has been their book."

The impression grows deeper and more vivid if we come to understand what the Bible is to those who in our own day keep up the tradition of the saintly character. The best men and women we ever knew have clasped this Book with hands that trembled with reverence. They drew from this common fountain. They sat together as scholars in this school. Surely the Bible is compassed about with a great crowd of witnesses. Nothing, no shifting of thought, can deprive it of this commanding credential —that in its pages men have found and still are finding the discipline and nurture of the Christian character.[1]

For the New Testament has one supreme office: it can introduce us into the very presence and companionship of the Son of God. The wind bloweth where it listeth, but every breeze among the branches of this tree whispers the

[1] Much of these last three paragraphs is due to Bishop Paget's volume *Studies in the Christian Character.*

Name that is above every name. To faithful souls the whole volume becomes alive with Him whom having not seen they love. Those who are at home in Scripture discover that it has no speech nor language where His voice is not heard. Through its chapters the Redeemer holds converse with His redeemed. There they behold His sacred Face in almost every page. To those who use it aright the New Testament becomes a real sacrament of Jesus Christ Himself. There, as nowhere else, we have found ourselves in the presence of Him Who is the Restorer of the lost, the Absolver of the guilty, the Resurrection and the Life of the dead. There we have heard His voice as the sound of many waters; and we know that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to our souls.

This Book has been cherished above every book in the history of Christendom. Precious copies of Scripture in the middle

ages were bound in gold and silver, and had their jewelled covers studded and embossed with tiny relics of saints. But in truth the books and chapters of the Bible constitute one glorious reliquary of sacred experience. There is a deep sense in which we may say concerning the great verses of Scripture, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?" And if these texts had tongues and could repeat the tale of their ministry down through the generations of the faithful, what marvels of experience they would reveal. Their biographies would be gathered from the four winds of heaven, and from the uttermost parts of the sea, "from lonely chambers, from suffering sick-beds, from the brink of the valley of the shadow of death, from scaffolds and fiery piles witnessing in sunlight, from moors and mountains beneath the stars, and in high places of the field, turning to

flight the armies of the aliens."

The manuscript pages of medieval Bibles were illuminated and blazoned into beauty by patient hands. But if, by some miracle, the saints' experience of Scripture could shine out between its lines, what an illumination of the text would be there! Indeed, we come to the meaning of the Bible by example as well as by grammar. Its most penetrating commentary is written in living letters. To read the book, or any part of it, by this light of actual experience, helps us to take it home as a possession to our own hearts. As Dr. John Ker says, there are promises and precepts which seem to lie beyond our reach; we have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. But someone of like passions with ourselves has passed that way before us, and has left a cup to be let down with his name and story graven on the rim.

The greatest books are written in

invisible ink, and they can be understood only by experience ; we must hold their pages before the fire of life before their full significance appears. This is emphatically true about the Bible. In days of gloom and anguish, when we are burdened by the misery in the world and daunted by the cold indifference of nature, when we are struggling with the demands of duty and the conflicting impulses of our own being, when we come face to face with the tragic facts of guilt and remorse and death—then we begin to understand the Bible as it was meant to be understood. To men and women who are racked with agony, Scripture becomes their refuge and strength, their very present help in time of trouble. Heine tells us that when he was reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* he wondered extremely how an old black slave should find so much more in the New Testament than he, with all his education and genius, could discover, and then he

continues: "Since I lay here sick and suffering, I have found out the reason. I have discovered that Uncle Tom read his New Testament with his back"—his back scarred by the lash: that led him into the soul and secret of God's Book.

From a story, now half-forgotten, by the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, we borrow another illustration of the same vital experience. "What happens to desolate souls who, forsaken by all the world, cry out to God, is a mystery which you can never fathom until you have been exactly where they are . . . A quaint old writer has said, 'God keeps His choicest cordials for the time of our deepest faintings.' And so it came to pass that as this poor woman closed her eyes and prayed earnestly . . . words of Holy Writ, heard years ago in church readings, in the hours of unconscious girlhood, now seemed to come back, borne in with a living power on her soul. It seemed almost as if a

voice within was saying to her: 'The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and thy foundation with sapphires. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children.'

"It is fashionable now to speak of words like these as fragments of ancient Hebrew literature, interesting and curious indeed, but relating to scenes, events and states of society long gone by. But it is a most remarkable property of this old Hebrew literature that it seems to be enchanted with a divine and living

power, which strikes the nerve of individual consciousness in every desolate and suffering soul. It may have been Judah or Jerusalem ages ago to whom these words first came, but as they have travelled down for thousands of years, they have seemed to tens of thousands of sinking and desolate souls as the voice of God to them individually. They have raised the burden from thousands of crushed spirits ; they have been as the day-spring to thousands of perplexed wanderers.

" The poor, ill-used, forsaken, forgotten creature who lay there trembling on the verge of life felt the presence of the mighty Spirit Who inspired these words. And surely if God ever did speak to man, no words were ever more worthy of Him. She lay as in a blessed trance, as passage after passage of Scripture rolled over her mind, like bright waves from the ocean of eternal peace.

" ' Fear thou not, for I am with thee ;

be not dismayed, for I am thy God. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee: for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.'" [1]

Amid experiences of battle and bloodshed the New Testament often becomes transfigured. To soldiers in the valley of the shadow of death, verses which had grown threadbare can glow and burn in letters of fire. Here are some testimonies written during the Great War: "I received the Testament in the trenches. I sacrificed my last candle. When morning dawned I was alone with the book I had been reading." "The hour comes when we must look death in the face. Then there is a giving way of

[1] Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Oldtown Folks*, i, 145–7 (ed. 1869).

all false props, and the Bible becomes the most precious thing on earth." A wounded Canadian who had to lie out all night between the lines in France wrote: "It was all right, though; for, thanks to the silent message of the little Testament, I was able to make my peace with my Maker." A shattered Italian soldier wrote from hospital: "I opened the golden little book. The Gospel has given peace to my soul. I was weak as a reed: now, I am strong like a tower." To men in such straits as these, Scripture can bring home the eternal Christian commonplaces—commonplaces in which all strength lies, and all consolation, and all hope.

Abuses of the Bible.

We do not ignore the fact that many Christians have cherished strange superstitions about the Scriptures—just as they have about the Sacraments and about the Church. Good men, who

revered the Bible have often read its words blindly, without intelligence. They have made it vain by their traditions. They have assumed any one verse to be as sacred as any other verse, as though the Book of Esther spoke with the same religious authority as the Gospel of John. Sometimes they have borrowed the letter of the Old Testament to strangle the spirit of the New. Sometimes they have treated the record of God's love as an arsenal of proof texts for hurling at their adversaries. Nay, they have quoted Scripture to justify their own bigotry and cruelty and persecution.

Yet the very abuses which have clustered round the Bible pay an inverted tribute to the spell of its power. Take one illustration only. The ancient world was full of magic, just as vast regions in Africa and China are full of magic now. The old Greeks and Romans used to practise divination with a copy of Homer

or Virgil, by turning over the pages of the poem until they stopped suddenly by hazard at some verse and tried to construe its words into an oracle. Far down beyond the middle ages we find men still consulting the *Sortes Virgilianæ*. In the same way superstition degraded the Scriptures into a book for soothsayers to employ. The early Christian Fathers denounced such divination as contrary to Christian faith. But before long even Church officials began to practise it with the Bible. When they met to choose a bishop, they would first open the Psalter at random for a text to indicate who should be elected. The same irrational use of the *Sortes Biblicæ* was resorted to even by so great a man as John Wesley, and it survives among not a few devout but superstitious Christians to-day.

Mystical Interpreters of Scripture.

It may be said, indeed, that the Bible

can heal the wounds which abuse of the Bible inflicts. Yet even saints who nourish their inward life from Scripture can hold curious notions concerning the volume they love. For some of them it seems too sacred for controversy. There are ardent Christians to whom discussions about the literary form of Scripture seem beside the mark, as futile as those ancient disputes in Eastern Churches about the shape and consistency of Eucharistic wafers. Other devout souls shrink from such inquiries, with the same kind of feeling which would forbid a bride to botanize among the flowers in her wedding wreath. The timid attitude which many good men assume toward Biblical criticism is founded on a true instinct—a sense of the organic unity of God's revelation, which they fear to lose if any flaws be admitted in its human record. Even in the early Church there were expositors of Scripture—and they have their followers to-day—who

indulged in fantastic applications of prophecy. Yet, after all, such weird interpretations did but express the intense conviction of the first Christians that all things must somehow speak of Christ. We are tempted to despise such quaint expositors—Patristic and Puritan. But we ought rather to recognize in them the gropings after some philosophy of history, which would show how every detail was related to the great central fact of the Incarnation. To these Christians nothing in the Bible could be irrelevant to Christ Himself.

On this point it is worth while to quote an illustrious example. We have referred already to St. Jerome as the translator of the Vulgate. Now for Jerome, familiarity with the Bible was merely the royal road to the knowledge and love of Christ. He did not hesitate to declare that "ignorance of the Bible means ignorance of Christ." [1] To his

[1] *Prol. in Comment in Isa.; cf. Tract. de Ps.* 77.

mind every single page of both Testaments seemed to centre round Christ. Hence in commenting on the words of the Apocalypse about the river and the tree of life, Jerome says: "One stream flows out from the throne of God, and that is the grace of the Holy Spirit, and that grace of the Holy Spirit is in the stream of the Scriptures. Yet has that stream twin banks, the Old Testament and the New, and the tree planted on either side is Christ." [1] We need not wonder, then, if his devout meditations applied everything he found in the Bible to Christ. "When I read the Gospel and find there testimonies from the Law and from the Prophets, I see only Christ; I so see Moses and the Prophets that I understand them of Christ. Then when I come to the splendour of Christ Himself, and when I gaze at that glorious sunlight, I care not to look at the lamplight. For what light can a lamp give

[1] *Tract de Ps.* 1.

when lit in the daytime? If the sun shines out, the lamplight does not shew. So, too, when Christ is present, the Law and the Prophets do not shew. Not that I would detract from the Law and the Prophets; rather do I praise them in that they shew forth Christ. But I so read the Law and the Prophets as not to abide in them but from them to pass to Christ." [1] Throughout his study of the Bible Jerome discovered the pearl of the Gospel: "There is one most priceless pearl: the knowledge of the Saviour, the mystery of His Passion, the secret of His Resurrection." [2]

Let us turn to another outstanding figure in the Western Church. According to Gregory the Great, the subject-matter of every part of the Bible

[1] *Tract. in Marcum, ix,* 1–7.

[2] *In Matt. xiii,* 45. These quotations from Jerome are taken from the Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XV, "given at St. Peter's, Rome, Sept. 15, 1920." The Epilogue to this Encyclical contains the following sentence: "Our one desire for all the Church's children is that, being saturated with the Bible, they may arrive at the all-surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ."

is the same—the revelation of God in Christ. "This is the key which unlocks the meaning of every book. The whole of Scripture begins and ends in Christ, and every word and act that is recorded receives in Him its ultimate significance. He is the centre of the Old Testament as well as of the New. The one foretells by allegory and prophecy that which the other openly proclaims. The last lies concealed in the first; or, as Gregory puts it, 'the Old Testament is the prophecy of the New, the New the explanation of the Old.' Christ is foreshadowed in the Old Testament, not only in its strictly prophetical utterances, but also in its historical narratives—'all the elect, being His forerunners in holiness of life, gave a prophetic promise of His coming by their actions and by their words. Every just man was in figure a herald of Christ'—and not only in its historical narratives, but even in its legal and ceremonial precepts. Every part of it

has an interior meaning which is plain to all who study it in the light of the Incarnation. The Old Testament is the New in symbol; and the New Testament is the Old made clear." [1]

Mystical interpreters of Scripture have had so wide an influence that it may be well to add some actual examples of their methods.

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from man made he a woman. (Gen. ii. 21–22). St. Augustine applies this to the origin of the Church from the pierced side of the second Adam: *Sic et Domino cum dormiret in cruce, latus Ejus percussum est, et sacramenta profluxerunt, unde facta est ecclesia.*

And Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. (Gen. xxii. 14).

[1] F. H. Dudden: *Gregory the Great*, Vol. II, p. 301.

On this St. Bernard remarks: "When thou givest up everything to and for Christ, thou dost not sacrifice Isaac, which signifies laughter, but a ram: not thy joy, but filthy, sinful delights which end in sorrow."

Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil. (Gen. xlix. 27). Tertullian sees in this a prophetic intimation of the most illustrious member of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. iii. 5), who in the morning of his life tore the sheep of God (Acts ix. 1) and in the evening fed them (Acts xx. 28).

Commenting on the verse *I laid me down and slept: I awaked for the Lord sustained me* (Psalm iii. 5) St. Augustine asks: "Is anyone foolish enough to believe that the prophet wished to tell us about his own sleeping and waking (as if it were some great thing!), except because that sleep was the Death, and that awakening was the Resurrection,

which it behoved him thus to prophecy concerning Christ."

In his exposition of Psalm civ. Augustine allegorizes throughout. The sun that "knoweth his going down" means the Sun of Righteousness that knew of His own death. The beasts that "get them together" and hide in their dens at the rising of this Sun, are the persecutors in heart, who yet do not dare to show themselves openly as such in the bright day of the Church's prosperity—and so on.

A favourite passage for mystical interpretation was Jeremiah xi. 19, where the Vulgate, following the Septuagint, reads, *Mittamus lignum in panem ejus, et eradamus eum de terra viventium.* Jeremiah represents his enemies to be plotting his secret destruction, saying, "Come, let us put wood in his bread and uproot him from the land of the living, and his name shall be remembered no more." With the Fathers, this

passage was construed into a prediction of the Crucifixion. Tertullian, for example, writes (*Contra Marcionem*, xix and xl) " The wood means of course the cross upon His body . . . He declared what He meant by the bread, when He called the bread His own body."

And thou shalt say, " I will go up to the land of unwalled villages : I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls and having neither bars nor gates." (Ezekiel xxxviii. 11). An early mystic interprets these words to suggest our rising up on the wings of faith into the calm of that heavenly land whose homes are unwalled, whose inhabitants are never more taken unawares and know their own security.

Interpretations like these seem fanciful enough ; yet underneath them lies some sure instinct of a profound truth. The idea that the whole world is sacramental is old in poetry, and old among mystical

data.[1] The sacramental doctrine of literature is symbolized in the Apocalypse, where we are told of a book written within and without—having an outward meaning and an inward sense. To those who can receive, master-works in the realm of books convey not only that which they express but a wealth of suggestion behind it. The infinite and eternal open up vistas through the gates and paths of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, and the deeps of meaning are not always those which were present to the conscious mind of the poet, who often wrote more wisely than he knew. Edmund Spenser may have had Queen Elizabeth in mind —as he himself affirms—but those on whom the spirit of his inspiration descends know better than he did that the *Faerie Queen* does not belong to England of the fifteenth century but to "the eternal brood of glory excellent."

[1] A. E. Waite: *Emblematic Masonry*, 1925. See Appendix V, from which much of this paragraph is borrowed.

In the same fashion we may discern that Scripture has a soul as well as a body. At any rate, the mystics did not err when they understood that Christ Himself is the Lord and Master of Scripture, which seeks as His minister to lead us up to Him and keep us close to Him continually.

In the preceding chapters we have pointed out the way in which the Bible towers above all other books. Nowhere except in its pages can we read the record of God's progressive manifestation of Himself—a manifestation made gradually, at sundry times and in divers manners, but converging and culminating in one supreme Personality. It is Christ Himself Who gives unity to the Scriptures, and incarnates their whole message and meaning. The dictum of Coleridge that the Bible approves itself as the Word of God because it finds men, comes true when it leads us on to Him Who is its completion and fulfilment. Because the Bible witnesses to Him, it is alive with the energies of His endless life.

Yet if it be true that God has given to the world a progressive revelation

extending through long ages in the past, the question naturally arises—can such a progress attain finality? Must we not expect rather that it will go on developing? No one dreams that we have reached the limits of human knowledge. Each fresh scientific treatise is provisional, it soon becomes out-of-date, it will be superseded like its forerunners. Nay, Christians themselves recognize that the Old Testament is now actually superseded; they set it aside wherever it contradicts or falls short of the New. In what sense can we claim religious finality for the New Testament? Has not the modern world of men already moved beyond its horizon? Must we not anticipate that future generations will make still further and fuller progress in the knowledge of God?

Objections of this kind sound plausible and effective, because there exists a curious superstition in regard to what is

called "progress." Men's minds to-day have become pre-occupied with a long steady succession of scientific discoveries and inventions. Progress is commonly understood to mean a gradual, unbroken advance, such as may be illustrated by the terms of a mathematical series or the stages in a biological development; and continuous progress of this kind is assumed to be the law in all departments of human life.

But a wider knowledge of history teaches us that in the super-scientific region—the realm of art and poetry and religion—no such law exists. Civilization itself refuses to advance without faltering and pausing and often retreating. The belief in unbroken social progress rests on nothing more secure than "the idea that the $(n + 1)th$ century must always fare better than the *nth*." On the other hand, history shows us how often the grandest spiritual ideas and achievements occurred once for

all in the early morning of civilization, and have never repeated themselves. There are men to-day who "find the old Jewish society in its hunger for righteousness going deeper into the secrets of practical ethics than the modern world does, just as they find the modern world surpassed by Athens and Florence in the sense for art." Can modern Greeks write a new Iliad, or even fight a new Marathon? Can modern architects build another cathedral like Chartres, or Lincoln, or Salisbury? Can modern sculptors carve the frieze to a new Parthenon? Which of our living dramatists will blossom into a second Shakespeare? And Shakespeare himself appeared suddenly, among a generation of what we might consider coarse, brutal, ill-taught Englishmen. Poets and artists of supreme genius are apt to have a genealogy after the order of Melchizedek. So the greatest prophets of religion meet us at the threshold and

not at the close of an era. Such men as Moses and Buddha were the founders of faith, and not its products. Whatever is most characteristic in their systems has come down as a legacy from its primitive author. And when we follow the Magi and make our way to the cradle of Christianity, we discover there a still more startling breach of continuity. That Advent, which earlier ages had indeed prepared for, cannot be explained as merely the last term in a gradual evolution. It was nothing less than the coming of the unseen world into this: it descended out of heaven from God. And therefore its latest results must continually look backwards and upwards to their First Originator, Who is Himself the beginning and the end of redemption, the Alpha and the Omega of God's love.

When Christians maintain the finality of Scripture, they mean that we have no need to go outside the Bible to learn

anything of God and His saving will towards us. The experience of the Church has not taught us how to improve upon the religion of the New Testament. All the sages of Christendom have never discovered a fresh spiritual truth of which the apostles were ignorant; they have never written a fresh treatise which deserves to be bound up with the Epistles and Gospels. All the saints together have not been able to add a single ray to the glory of Jesus Christ. We still stand in the twentieth century where men stood in the first, or rather He stands as high above us as He stood above His earliest disciples—the supreme and perfect Master, the immortal Head of the fellowship of faithful souls.

The New Testament has a spiritual finality which experience only ratifies and confirms. Men can make progress indeed in appreciating and applying what it teaches. For instance, slavery has been abolished, by the gradual working

out of principles laid down by St. Paul. Yet it remains true, as Scripture implies, that in certain early stages of human society slavery may be not an absolute evil, but the necessary prelude to some better thing. Consider—to take another example—modern ideas in regard to marriage and the status of women. Some of these ideas, which fly in the face of the New Testament, are false and doomed to ruinous failure. All of them, in their most exalted and ideal chivalry, fall short of St. Paul's great comparison —so astounding, in such an age—of wedded love to the love of Christ for His Church. It may be argued, that no apostle, no son of the ancient world, could possibly enter into modern sentiment on this subject. But the Bible, as a whole, is saner than a good deal of modern sentiment. It never ignores the complex basis of human emotions; it never disguises that strange marriage of flesh and spirit, indissoluble in this

life, which constitutes each human personality.

The more we ponder the message of Scripture, the less possible it appears to add to its wisdom. Consider even those much-disputed early chapters of Genesis. Criticism has taken them to pieces, and has told us how the narratives assumed their present shape. But that does not explain their origin. A modern preacher once remarked with caustic irony, "It must have been a matter of great difficulty to begin the Bible." Has anyone ever suggested an alternative beginning? Is such an alternative thinkable? The primitive story of the Fall may be a myth or a symbolic parable, but does that affect the awful penetrating truth which it symbolizes? The cardinal facts of human nature are there—the divine in conflict with the devilish, and both contrasted with the innocence of all other creatures. Has philosophy come nearer to solving the

mystery of the beginning of evil? Has progress cancelled the primal curse of man's toil and woman's travail? Hunger and love remain what they have always been, the forces which move the world; and out of their working proceed the joys and miseries of mankind.

Notwithstanding all our inventions and improvements, human nature continues what it was when history began. Changed conditions of living do not alter the ancient issues of life. Men have still the same elemental needs, the same passions, the same sins, the same sorrows, the same hopes, the same capacities for good and evil. They must needs live in the presence of the changeless God. It is His revelation of Himself to the world which is recorded in Scripture, and which gives Scripture enduring value for all generations. The Bible is the Bible, because it deals with the problems of God's being and will, and of man's duty and destiny. It tells us all that we need

to know on these supreme matters, all that we can know. Sometimes it speaks darkly, in mystic language. But when it is silent, we may be wise to hold our peace: the last word has been said.

The verdict of so profound and courageous a scholar as Robertson Smith still deserves pondering: "Of this I am sure, that the Bible does speak to the heart of man in words that can only come from God—that no historical research can deprive me of this conviction, or make less precious the Divine utterances that speak to the heart. For the language of the words is so clear that no readjustment of their historical setting can conceivably change the substance of them. Historical study may throw a new light on the circumstances in which they were first heard or written. In that there can only be gain. But the plain, central, heart-felt truths that speak for themselves and rest on their own indefeasible

worth will assuredly remain with us."

Side by side with this, we may set the judgment of Theodore Watts-Dunton, who was perhaps the most accomplished and penetrating literary critic of our time: "A great living savant has characterized the Bible as 'a collection of the rude imaginings of Syria,' 'the worn-out old bottle of Judaism into which the generous new wine of science is being poured.' The great savant was angry when he said so. The 'new wine' of science is a generous vintage, undoubtedly, and deserves all the respect it gets from us; so do those who make it and serve it out; they have so much intelligence; they are so honest and fearless. But whatever may become of their wine in a few years, when the wine-dealers shall have passed away, when the savant is forgotten as any star-gazer of Chaldæa —the 'old bottle' is going to be older yet—the Bible is going to be eternal."

The Everlasting Gospel.

It was a maxim with the Reformers that the Scriptures bore their meaning on their face, and that a plain man could interpret them for himself. As applied to particular texts, that maxim breaks down. But if we take the New Testament as a whole, the Reformers were not mistaken. About the broad character of the Gospel narratives it certainly needs no specialist to come to a conclusion. Here the appeal to the plain man and the appeal to the historic consciousness of Christendom amount practically to the same thing.

It may be said without fear of contradiction that of all books which exist in the world, the four brief biographies which bear the names of the evangelists have exerted, and are still exerting, the most powerful and the most vital influence. Men find themselves compelled to acknowledge this remarkable fact, even though they confess that they

cannot explain it or give any sufficient reason for it. Most ancient books are dead or dormant. Perhaps none of us altogether understand why the Gospels have lived and still go on living, any more than we know why we ourselves are alive. But assuredly no other work which was ever penned exhibits the same intense and miraculous vitality. At this present moment the Gospels are being read and studied and pondered and discussed and commented on more eagerly than ever. No other writings excite such attention or, on the other hand, arouse such hostility. To-day the evangelists are speaking in the tongues of the world, they are moving among all nations, they penetrate the far corners of the earth with a message which has power to make its way into the heart of every human creature.

When we open these Gospels, we recognize that each of them is taken up with the picture of a single Person.

Their whole significance clusters round the same central Figure. Across that stage where Jews are disputing and politicians are conspiring and sick and sorrowful folk are passing in sad procession, while the disciples listen and question and marvel, there moves One Who is unlike them all, supreme above them all. Each of our records, indeed, is coloured by the individuality and experience of its writer. Yet the strange thing about the Gospels is that they are nevertheless all of a piece. There is a congruity in the Character they describe. He stands out in a moral and spiritual pre-eminence which nothing can obscure.

Here is Rousseau's judgment, given in his *Emile* (book IV): "Shall we say that the Gospel story is a work of imagination? Friend, that is not how one invents; the facts about Socrates, which no one doubts, are not so well attested as those about Jesus Christ. At best you are only putting the difficulty away

from you, without getting rid of it. It would be more incredible that four men should have agreed to manufacture this book than that there was a single man who supplied the subject matter for it. No Jewish authors could have hit upon its tone or its morality ; the Gospel has notes of reality which are so great, so striking, so absolutely inimitable, that their inventor would be a more astonishing person than their hero."

Moreover Christ as described by the evangelists is in nothing more consistent than in this—that He quietly assumes His own right to men's homage and loyalty. He demands obedience, not merely on account of what He does and what He says, but because He is what He is. He deals directly with all sorts and conditions of people. Whatever be their racial or national traditions, or the level of their culture, or the standards of their religion and ethics, He confronts them with Himself, He appeals to them in

terms fitted to their own experience, and He speaks always as commanding their surrender and adoration.

When we examine more closely, we are struck by the fact that the evangelists are curiously brief and fragmentary. They provide us with no complete biography. They did not cultivate the art of narration, at least they give their readers no full or detailed account of the years of that Life which is the light of men. It has been said that they pay little attention to chronology, they show slight regard for the historic setting of their story. The modern reader is frequently surprised to find how narrow is the cycle of events, how brief are the discourses reported in the Gospels. "All the recorded sayings of Christ—how long would they take to pronounce? With due gravity and emphasis they might take six hours—hardly, perhaps, so much. In other words, they would take no more than two great political speeches."

The reticence and restraint of the evangelists are extraordinary. Indeed, they never profess to be exhaustive. They warn us, on the contrary, that they have left much untold. The fourth Gospel breaks off with a confession of its own incompleteness: "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." Some devout Christians have been tempted to hanker after a biography fuller than those we possess, which would tell us many things that they leave us wistful to know. Suppose, for instance, that St. Luke had recorded at length Christ's discourse on the road to Emmaus: but something sealed the lips of that evangelist. Or suppose the woman who was a sinner, who washed Christ's feet with her tears, had been permitted to write down for us a Gospel according to Mary. Modern authors

who take in hand to depict the Life that is above every life often fail disastrously, just because they will not curb their imagination from attempting to invent what the evangelists failed to supply. But the evangelists knew what they were about. They have told us all that it is necessary for us to know concerning Him whom they called Lord and Master ; and to add fiction to their record is to rob them of their simplicity and strength. We have no sure knowledge of Jesus Christ, apart from the pages of the Gospels : but those pages preserve as much as it is needful for us to know.

Because the Gospels, brief as they are, contain something that goes beyond a history or a philosophy. They convey a revelation. They disclose the hidden character and will of God, and they do this in terms of the life and experience of a Person. We can conceive of no other medium for bringing us into personal contact with the Most High.

God manifests Himself in nature and in moral law: but these impersonal media have no power to unveil fully the secrets of His truth and beauty and goodness and self-sacrificing love. We can understand such qualities only as they are expressed in personality, and in terms of the human life which we ourselves share. Since the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, we behold His glory, full of grace and truth. The evangelists present men with a personal revelation of God in terms of our common humanity.

For these records of Jesus Christ, from the cradle at Bethlehem to the cloud at Bethany, convey more than a tale of what is past. They speak in accents which are timeless and universal. The written Gospels give us such a vision of the events of revelation that we come under the personal influence of the Revealer. They serve to bring us into living contact with Christ Himself. "It

is this total massive impression of Some One unearthly which beats in upon the reader; and in the long run this impression carries evidence of its own reality." The records of the Crucified are still potent to convince men and women of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. The words which He speaks unto us are exempt from change and decay; for they utter the living thoughts of the never-changing Word, "thoughts of which all things that happen on this planet are but illustrations and examples." Everywhere men confess that in the Gospels they come face to face with One who still lives in the fulness of His power and love—One who is never far from the humblest reader with a teachable heart. Erasmus summed up the matter in sentences which have often been quoted, but which are worth quoting again: "The Gospels bring before thee a living image of Christ Himself, speaking,

healing, dying, rising again. In a word, so complete is the image they present, that if He stood before thine eyes, thou wouldest see Him not more plainly, but less."

Modern study suggests that the present form of each Gospel may be due to a more active reaction than scholars formerly supposed. But after we have made out by criticism of the documents all that it is possible to make out of the history behind them, we are still confronted by the final problem—what that history reveals to us of the Reality behind the universe. One, and only one conclusion, is vouched for, alike by the earliest converts of the apostles and by the experience of present day Christians from the Papist to the Plymouth brother. They all alike believe themselves to be in touch with Love's eternal Personality —concerning Whom, however little we know, we know enough to hold communion with Him and to drink in from

Him what He gives us of Himself. The Man from whom the Christian Church has drawn through the centuries its unexhausted life still stands there amid the flux of human opinions—the same yesterday and to-day and forever.

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels and knows.

When the Pilgrim Fathers bade farewell to Holland, John Robinson, who had been their minister at Leyden, gave them a parting exhortation in which occurred his memorable sentence: "I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word." Commentators and preachers have not exhausted the Scriptures; and spiritual perception begins where most sermons and commentaries leave off. While the substance of revelation is final, our apprehension and interpretation of it must grow with our inward

growth. The Christian Gospel is final as regards the perfection of that Person, concerning Whom we on our side are always learning more. But there is no finality about our conceptions of Him, still less about the phrases and formulas in which we half express and half conceal His glory. The Name which is above every name often means more to those who adore Him than it has meant as yet to those who proclaim Him. For that Name has a wonder-working power like the power of the greatest music ; it calls to what is universal in man, and man cannot but respond. The secret lies beyond our analysis, like all ultimate facts ; for mystery belongs to the nature of things, and there is nothing real but shares it.

Nevertheless our faith that Scripture records a revelation which can never be superseded is founded upon a rock. This faith does not build on miraculous events in the life of Christ, nor on some

merely theoretical proof that He comes into history as a visitor from beyond the world of time, nor on the notion of an infallible institution which He is said to have created. In the last resort this faith rests on the spiritual values embodied in Christ Himself—values which are absolute and everlasting. Changes have come in the past, and more changes will come in the future, over men's apprehension of Him. But it is not conceivable that there can ever be an advance beyond those personal sanctities of justice, mercy, faithfulness, and self-forgetful love which Christ sets at the Heart of the universe. In Him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily—the eternal verities of existence, human and Divine.

THE END

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